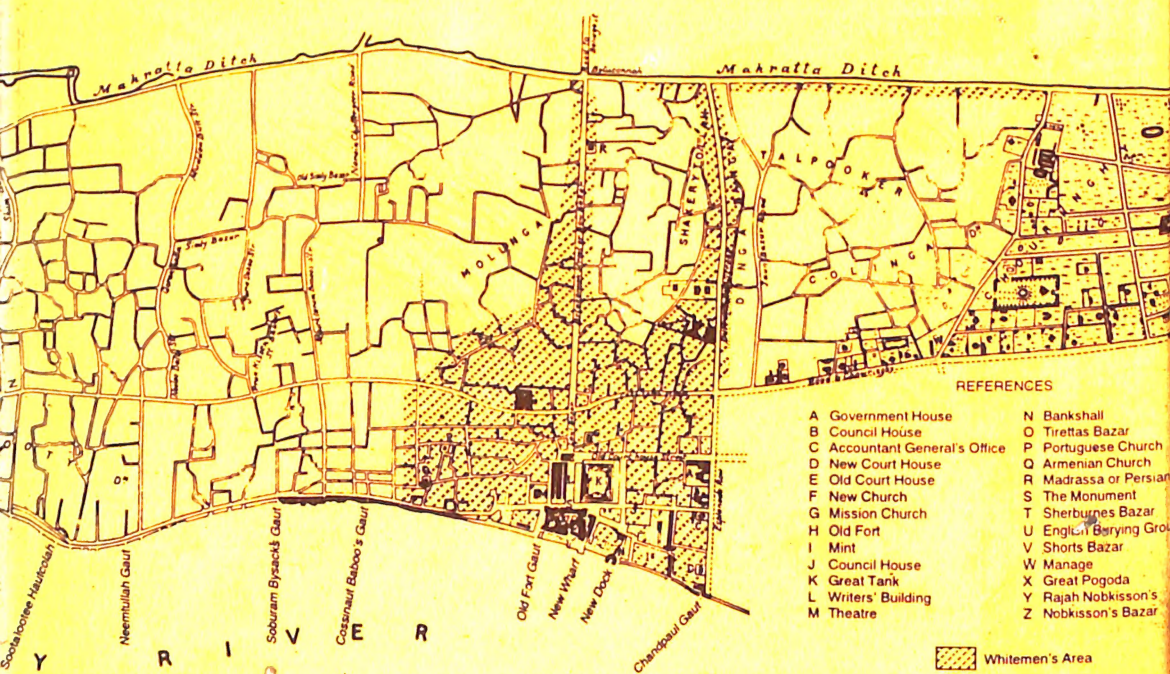


# ANATOMY OF A COLONIAL TOWN CALCUTTA 1756 - 1794

Soumitra Sreemani



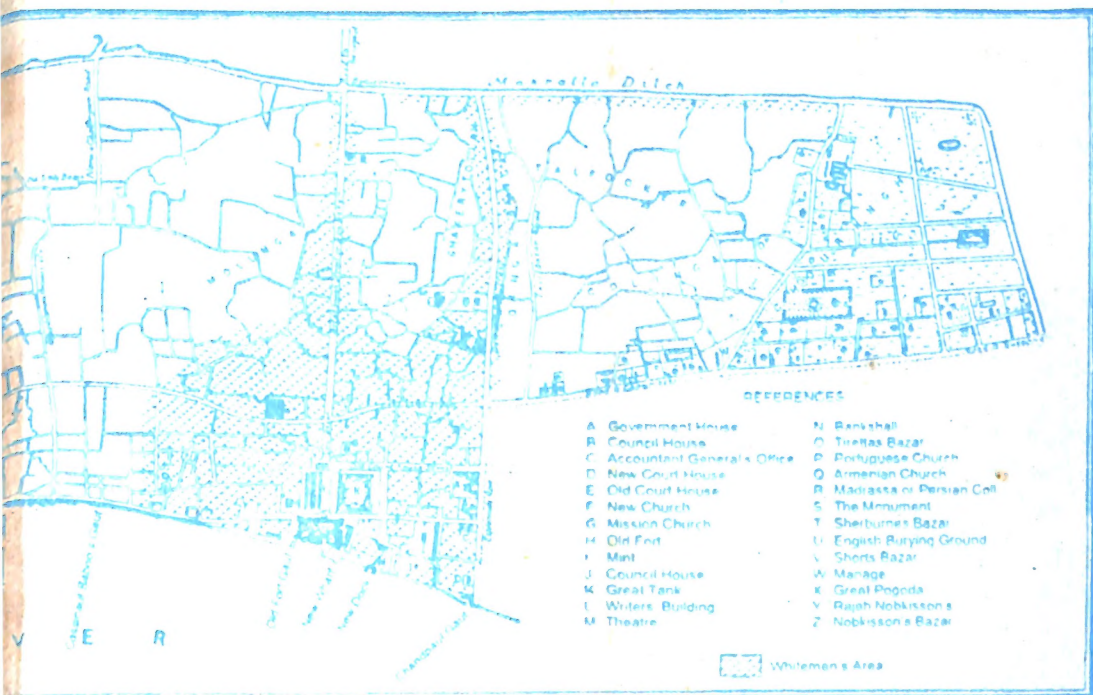


Cover illustrations

*Front cover :* Map of Calcutta based  
on Lt. Col. Mark Wood  
in 1784-85.

*Back cover :* Impression of the Seal  
of the East India  
Company.









**ANATOMY OF A COLONIAL TOWN  
CALCUTTA, 1756-1794**

**SOUMITRA SREEMANI**



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## P R E F A C E

Calcutta in the middle of the eighteenth century was neither a town nor a village. It was situated half the way from a cluster of villages transforming themselves into a magnificent town. The present work aims at understanding the decisive aspects of these transformations—the agonies of its prosaic constraints and the ecstasies of the fulfilment of its possibilities. Our period starts in 1756 when Calcutta was sacked by the invading armies of the Nawab of the province. This sack was immediately followed by the sack of Chander-nagore by the English army. Thus the starting point of our study is the one that signifies an urban setback. The study ends in 1794 because in that year the first official declaration demarcating Calcutta's boundaries came into effect. Between these two polar points the present work tries to discover why Calcutta could not assume the characteristic of a full-fledged urban settlement and why it had to wait till such time as the coming into force of the Lottery Committee for its final take-off. No work on this subject can claim to be an exhaustive one and therefore the first word of this work is one of humility. One may say that the contours of a subject is drawn.

The present volume has accrued from a dissertation submitted in the Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta for the purpose of obtaining Ph.D. degree. Much kindness was bestowed upon me by several persons and institutions when I was involved in this study. I must record my debt of gratitude to Dr. Ranjit Sen of Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, under whose supervision the present work came to a shape. I am equally grateful to the Governing Body of the P. N. Das College, 24 Parganas (North), West Bengal, for granting me one year's leave from my service. The librarian and staff of the National Archives of India, New Delhi and the West Bengal State Archives, the National Library, the



Asiatic Society, the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and the Rabin-dra Bharati University Library, Calcutta, have been extremely cooperative throughout. I am also indebted to the Hon'ble Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court and his staff at the Court archives with whose permission and assistance I could go through the relevant records of the Mayor's Court and the then Supreme Court. The Director of the National Library was kind enough to issue in my favour some copies or rare maps from the Library. The financial assistance from the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi enabled me to undertake a journey to New Delhi and to complete some vital works including the one at the National Archives of India. I take this opportunity to thank them all. My thanks also go to Sri Babul De for all the artworks, M/s. Firma KLM Private Ltd. for publication and to M.s. Akhar Mala for printing the entire volume within a very short period. Though there was a lot of endeavour a few printing errors could not be avoided for which I present unqualified apology to the readers.

CALCUTTA,

January, 1994

SOUMITRA SREEMANI

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*Abbreviations used :—*

B. P. P.	— Bengal Past and Present.
B. O. R. (Judicial)	— Board of Revenue (Judicial).
B. O. R. Misc.	— Board of Revenue (Miscellaneous)
B. O. R. (Sayer)	— Board of Revenue (Sayer)
Cal. C. O. R.	— Calcutta Committee of Revenue.
C. O. R.	— Committee of Revenue.
C. P. C.	— Calendar of Persian Correspondence.
F. W. I. H.	— Fort William—India House Correspondence.
Fever Hospital	— General Committee of the Fever Hospital and Municipal Improvement.
G. G. in C.	— Governor General in Council.
Home (Public)	— Home Department (Public Branch).
Progs.	— Proceedings.
R. B. W. C.	— Revenue Board Consisting of Whole Council.
Rev. Reptt.	— Revenue Department.
Selections	— Selections from Unpublished Records of Government.



## INTRODUCTION

### 1. *Tradition of town-building.*

The process of urbanisation in India from the days of the Indus Valley civilization reveals many unique features. Eastern India was not an exception. All "the nine victory camps of the Palas may have been towns"<sup>1</sup> Again "The great expansion of commerce during the Mughal period—to be seen most conspicuously in the manufacturing and marketing of textiles to meet both an internal and an external demand—inevitably brought increased wealth to the major urban centres of the country."<sup>2</sup> Some towns were regularly built for administrative purposes. Shahjahanabad or Delhi, Farrukhabad, Agra, Fatehpur-Sikri may be mentioned in this regard. In Bengal, Dhaka and then Murshidabad were good examples of such urban growth. Everywhere the zeal of the rulers and unbridled mobilisation of resources on their part helped the towns and cities to flourish.

But what does urbanisation really mean? In his celebrated study, Max Weber points out certain inevitable features from which a town can be identified. To him, economic versatility of a town is essential and that can be assured by the presence of markets. But not every market can act as a catalyst in the formation of a town. Certain degree of protection as well as patronage are needed.<sup>3</sup> India during the rule of the Mughals was able to receive that kind of patronage. "What Delhi or Agra were for the

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1. R. S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism, 300-1200*. (Calcutta, 1965), p. 245.

2. T. Raychaudhuri and I. Habib, ed. *The Cambridge economic History of India*, (Longman, India, 1984) vol. I. p. 441.

3. Max Weber, *The City*; ed. and translated by Don Martindale and Gertrud Nienwirth (Illinois, 1958) pp. 66-7.



empire as a whole, Patna was for Bihar, or Burhanpur for Khandesh, the administrative focal points of a province or region.”<sup>4</sup> Irfan Habib’s contentions in this matter are too clear to understand ; “relatively high proportion of urban population in India”, argues Habib was chiefly due to the far larger proportion of cash-crop which ultimately helped the towns to flourish.<sup>5</sup>

Hence the urban growth had already taken a deep root in India. But it is unfair to trace its history on any European model. The essential features of a “full urban community” as detailed by Weber include, among many others, “1. a fortification ; 2. a market ; 3. a court of its own and at least partially autonomous law”, etc.<sup>6</sup> In such a settlement the role of burghers is very important. Surely the growth of trade and commerce and relatively higher degree of freedom among the inhabitants was an understandable phenomenon in Europe.<sup>7</sup> But that standard in the Indian context was not possible to achieve. Yet towns grew. As the Mughals were truly an urban people their interest in town-building had become proverbial. “On surface the setting up of military posts, *thanas* with an imperial deputy appears to be a simple matter. Even where a new town for the purpose was to be founded the procedure was equally uncomplicated. Forty *namazis*, a central mosque and a central bazar was all that according to Muslim legists was needed to found a town.”<sup>8</sup> So, it was too easy to form the nucleus of a town. But urbanisation during the Mughal regime and also during the period under study does not necessarily reflect those standards which

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4. *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. I. p. 434.

5. *Ibid.* pp. 168-170.

6. Weber, *op. cit.* pp. 80-81.

7. J. W. Thompson, E. N. Johnson, *An Introduction to Medieval Europe, 300-1500*. (New York, no date), pp. 580-85.

8. H. K. Napvi, *Urbanisation and Urban Centres under the Great Mughals* (Simla, 1971), pp. 4-5.

were available in the contemporary world. Hence the "minimum standard" as exemplified by Ashish Bose for the formation of an urban community,<sup>9</sup> is impossible to get during the second half of the eighteenth century.

Broadly speaking urbanisation during the period under study meant existence of a market or a garrison or a pilgrim centre like Madurai.<sup>10</sup> Even in the earlier decades of the eighteenth century Calcutta had exhibited some distinct features which together could act as a nucleus for a town. Calcutta had already achieved a certain degree of growth between the years 1700 and 1750.<sup>11</sup> Calcutta's wealth had become so proverbial that a Nawab like Alivardi Khan even chose to extract money from the English company in Calcutta in the wake of the Maratha raids.<sup>12</sup>

The ascendancy of the colonial powers, the English, the French and the Dutch robbed the Indian towns of the patronage they needed much. Hence the golden age of Mughal town-building met its end during the eighteenth century. Irfan Habib's computations prove the decline of

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9. Ashish Bose, *Urbanisation in India : An Inventory of Source Materials*. (Bombay, 1970) Bose has presented some minimum standards for the formation of a city and also urban community in the context of our contemporary world. pp. 63-65, 103-4.
  10. Susan J. Lewandowski, "Changing Form and Function in the Ceremonial and Colonial Port City in India : An Historical Analysis of Madurai and Madras." In K. N. Chaudhuri and C. J. Dawey ed. *Economy and Society : Essays in Indian Economic and Social History*. (New Delhi, 1979). Here the author has termed Madurai as a "ceremonial city" based on ancient traditions and legends.
  11. J. N. Sarkar ed. *History of Bengal*, (Dacca, 1976) vol. II. pp. 418-9.
  12. P. J Marshall, *Bengal : The British Bridgehead, Eastern India, 1740-1828*. (Cambridge, 1987), p. 71.

urban population during the period under study. According to him the percentage of such population was only 13 in the year 1800 while in 1600 the figure might have been 15.<sup>13</sup>

So India in general, had been experiencing a steady decline in urban population. Though C. A. Bayly believes that north Indian towns witnessed a certain degree of "stability" during the years 1770-1810,<sup>14</sup> the picture was certainly not clear. When we study the nature of urbanisation in Calcutta our attention is drawn to some other townships of the contemporary period. Even during the ascendancy of the English company in northern India Lucknow grew into an important urban settlement by the personal persuasion of its ruler, Asaf-ud-Daulah, who ruled from 1775 to 1797.<sup>15</sup> "Awadh provides some good examples of dynastic town-building."<sup>16</sup> "Approximately a crore of rupees (.....) was spent by the nawab and his nobles in the city of Lucknow in legendary prodigality on luxury goods and patronage of urban culture."<sup>17</sup> Similar was the case of Jaipur, another township built by personal initiative. Its building was started in 1727 and it was one of the finest towns that India ever had. Excellent buildings, wide roads and fine planning are still the hall marks of this place.<sup>18</sup> Bengal had the same experience when it was ruled by Sujauddin. As the Nawab he went into an ecstacy of town building. So

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13. *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. I. p. 169.
  14. C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars, North Indian society in the age of British expansion, 1770-1870*. (Cambridge, 1983). Chapter 3.
  15. V. T. Oldenburg, *Peril, Pestilence, and Parfidy : The Making of Colonial Lucknow, 1856-1877*. (Michigan, 1985), pp. 2-3.
  16. Bayly, *op. cit.* p. 116.
  17. Oldenburg, *op. cit.* p. 7.
  18. J. N. Sarkar, *A History of Jaipur*. ed. by Raghubir Singh, (New Delhi, 1984), pp. 205-7.



Lucknow, Jaipur and Murshidabad present a picture where individual interest and prodigality of rulers changed their destinies.

## 2. *The crisis.*

However, these examples of town-building are very few in number. Efforts of town-building were becoming increasingly limited when the colonial masters started to rule. Probably it is not incorrect to emphasise that the middle of the eighteenth century in Bengal was a period of crisis.<sup>19</sup> This crisis was an all-pervading phenomenon. It engulfed the entire body politic of Bengal and the entire economy on which a society in transition had come to rest. It involved the confidence of the ruler and the ruled and it was a crisis at the administrative level of the rule of the Nawab as well as the East India Company. This crisis was again reflected in the formation of colonial townships in Madras, Bombay and Calcutta in the second half of the eighteenth century. Often it has been argued that formation of Calcutta as a town and its eventual growth—all were a part of a grand design by its colonial masters.<sup>20</sup> But Calcutta's growth was not in the least a natural one because the crisis had beset its scope to grow as an urban centre. The colonial masters had no interest to mobilise fund nor did they have any articulated policy for urbanising India. Hence the general benevolence of the Mughals towards their subjects were totally absent during the colonial regime. The result was that initiative was left to private individuals who invested their labour and wealth for the promotion of the town. The Mughal phenomenon was certainly not available in Calcutta in the second half of the eighteenth century. Calcutta did not even witness any favour to the builders which the East India Company distributed in Madras.

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19. P. J. Marshall, *op. cit.* for details see Ch. III.

20. Sushil Chaudhuri, "Ingrej Kompany O Kolkata Nagar" in Bengali weekly *Desh* dtd. 9 June 1990, particularly p. 34.

As a result Madras experienced a building boom.<sup>12</sup> But Indians did a little, if not much, to compensate their alien masters' lack of initiative in town-building.

### 3. *The rise of colonial powers and urban decline.*

It is often said that a steady decline of Indian towns coincided with the ascendancy of the colonial powers in the country and only Ahmedabad could survive. K. L. Gillion believes that Ahmedabad could survive for long due to certain extraordinary reasons. "Murshidabad fell because it was a creature of the court, Dacca because of its dependence on the export trade and on a single staple which was ousted by a cheaper product, and Surat because it was both too dependent on overseas commerce (as Ahmedabad was not) and too close to Bombay."<sup>22</sup> Murshidabad found none to look after her during such a terrible famine as the one in 1770. Even the Nawab there could not afford a large number of people in his service.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the pre-eminent position of Dhaka in cotton textile was lost with the coming of machine-made thread from England in 1785. Its population declined and the town met its ultimate doom very quickly. By this way, the political and military hegemony of the colonial powers could change the entire calculus of town-growth in India. The traditional patronage which the aristocracy offered to the numerous *karakhanas* or factories and the large population<sup>24</sup> that gathered

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21. Narayani Gupta, *Towers, Tanks and Temples : Some Aspects of Urbanism in South India ; Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century*. (Occasional Paper Series ; Urban History Association of India, Amritsar, 1983), p. 20.

22. K. L. Gillion, *Ahmedabad : Study in Indian Urban History*, (California, 1968), p. 40.

23. K. M. Mohsin, *A Bengal District in Transition : Murshidabad 1765-1793*. (Dacca, 1973) pp. 222-3.

24. Narayani Gupta, *Delhi between Two Empires, 1803-1931 Society, Government and Urban Growth* (New Delhi, 1981) p. 2.

around these *karkhanas* could not be found during this period. The foreigners were too zealous to promote the goods imported from their respective countries and to destroy indigenous crafts. Not only these, the English were never interested in raising a nominal infrastructure. "The local merchants and bankers agreed in 1856 to raise a loan for building a permanent bridge over the Jamuna which would enable the railways line from Calcutta to be extended to Delhi."<sup>25</sup> Delhi was not a single case. The basic principle behind any settlement of the English East India Company was furtherance of its trade. So whether it was in Madras in 1721<sup>26</sup> or in Bombay in 1668,<sup>27</sup> the motive of the Company was clear. Infrastructures could be built up only as appendages to trade.

But how did the colonial masters look at their settlements in India? The primary interest was to raise fortifications. These fortifications were needed to instil confidence among the settlers and to protect the trading interest. When the population of Lucknow was declining steadily, the Company expended "1.9 million rupees or 75 per cent of the entire budget of the PWD for the province" in military construction.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the finest buildings of Delhi

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25. *Ibid.* p. 18.

26. C. S. Srinivasachari, *History of the City of Madras : Written for the Tercentenary Celebration Committee, 1939.* (Madras, 1939) p. 140 In 1721 the government undertook the direct control of three old villages namely, Egmore, Purasawakam and Tondairpet, which hitherto rented "It was found that the lake in Purasawakam had to be repaired and as a large number of weavers were desirous of settling in that village, several facilities were given to them for doing so."

27. S. M. Edwards. *The Rise of Bombay : A retrospect.* (Bombay, 1920), p. 114. "an exodus of wavers from Chaul had necessitated the opening of a street."

28. Oldenburg, *op. cit.* p. 12; pp. 26-34; pp. 50-51.

after the rebellion of 1857 were demolished for the same purposes.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. Constraints for urbanisation.

So no wide-scale urbanisation under a colonial rule was possible for certain inherent constraints. "The colonial city" is "most typically characterised by the physical segregation of its ethnic, social and cultural component groups."<sup>30</sup> Hence all the towns were divided strictly on colour lines.<sup>31</sup> If one makes a study of the pattern of urban settlement of Madras, the first important town under the English in India, such divisions become very apparent.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, in Patna, the English raised a new and separate settlement for themselves.<sup>33</sup> Hence what has been said of Lucknow, may be identified with other towns also. The "internal dynamics of the colonial provincial town stood in sharp contrast to those that had existed in the nawabi city that it replaced."<sup>34</sup> Though it is a common belief that topographic advantage of Bombay helped it to grow as a cosmopolitan town, free from certain defects still the

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29. Narayani Gupta, *Delhi between Two Empires*. p. 27.

30. A. D. King, *Colonial Urban Development : Culture, social power and environment*. (London, 1976) p. 17.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

32. The study of Lewandowski on Madras, one of the earliest colonial settlements in India proves this fact. "The wealthiest and most prestigious residents of the city resided in closest proximity to the inner Fort, containing the factory house. White Town developed on the north side of the Fort to house the European, Eurasian and Native Christian population ... Black Town, the extension of Madrasapatam, was the residential quarter for the city's indigenous inhabitants" Lawandowski, *op. cit.* p. 314.

33. Surendra Gopal, *Patna in the nineteenth century* (Calcutta 1982) p. 3 and p. 5.

34. Oldenburg, *op. cit.* p. 256.

place had a separate "native town" and that too outside the Fort-walls.<sup>35</sup>

The process of urbanisation in Calcutta had some unique features. Its transformation into a large global commercial centre had its root deeply connected with the 'craze for calicoes' by the English trading companies<sup>36</sup> The growth of textile-exports from Bengal between 1690 and 1740, and "the burgeoning profits to be made on the triangular trade between India, China and Britain, had gradually built up the importance of Calcutta."<sup>37</sup> With these were connected certain political reasons. In the process was the year 1756. This year had a serious effect on the life of the town. It witnessed the first major clash between two opposing interests in Bengal ; first, the political one represented by the Nawab of the *Subah* and second one, the trading interest, represented by the English East India Company in Bengal. The political asylum afforded to the family of Raja Rajballabh in Calcutta was a clear challenge to the Nawab. In the wake of the trouble between Siraj-ud-daulah and Rajballabh regarding the accounts of Dhaka, it was widely held then that Rajballabh could procure shelter for his family at Calcutta in lieu of a "part of ill-gotten money" for which the Nawab had hauled him up.<sup>38</sup> Rajballabh was ably assisted by Omi Chand, a contractor and a product of the English trading interests. So the flow of money had started towards Calcutta. Even Alivardi Khan had long been apprehensive of Calcutta where "wealth" was "accumulating beyond his reach." And that economic power provided the English the

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35. Edwards, *op. cit.* pp. 228-9.
  36. Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800*. (Delhi, 1990), pp. 89-124.
  37. C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*. (Cambridge, 1988) p. 49.
  38. R. C. Majumdar, *Maharaja Rajballabh* (Calcutta, 1947). p. 34.



political power which the Nawab tried to arrest.<sup>39</sup> The sack of the town in 1756, precipitated a determined effort on the part of the foreign Company and its associates to destroy the Nawab and, by it the entire political system of the *Subah*.

The battle of Palasi in 1757 changed the entire system in Bengal. Calcutta assumed a much greater importance in all spheres of life. This growth meant the growth of a new system—political, economic as well as social. The traditional aristocracy began to lose not only power but also property. Calcutta witnessed the decline of such traditional aristocrats and property-owners as Maharaja Krishna Chandra of Nadia and such old-time contractors as Omi Chand. A new class of people emerged at their expense. They were chiefly comprador by profession. Chandi Charan Sen in his two historical fictions<sup>40</sup> had elaborately discussed the actual position in Calcutta in the wake of their emergence. The execution of Nanda Kumar proved the decline of the power-elite who had descended from the Mughal regime. It may be said that it was the day for the rise of money-elite like, Dewan Ganga Gobinda Singha, Maharaj Nabakrishna, Gokul Ghosal and Krishna Kanta Nandi.

##### 5. *The property-impetus.*

This new class of people began to settle at Calcutta and formed the indigenous aristocracy in the town. The security of their lives and the protection of their properties through the English system of judiciary encouraged them to settle here. As a person could own as much property as he desired and as each of such properties was placed under

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39. P. J. Marshall, *op. cit.* p. 80.

40. For details : Chandi Charan Sen, *Dewan Ganga Gobinda Singh* (in Bengali) (Calcutta, 1297 B. S.) and *Maharaj Nandakumar* (in Bengali) (Calcutta, Reprint, 1985).

assessment of rent, it was expected that the owners should take their best personal interest in developing their assets so that they could get a maximum return from their investments. This norm was applicable to all the property-owners in Calcutta. Since Calcutta meant the centre of power and patronage a considerable number of men of wealth assembled here. Such accumulation of property-seekers and such acquisitions of properties by Indians as well as private Europeans gave Calcutta a little respectability which it lacked earlier.

In the early years of urbanisation the settlers were attracted by the Company through a lure of property-right in Calcutta. The Company needed money and that too, regularly. In fact, the Company first assumed the administration of the place in the role of a revenue collector. Since the Company decided to honour the title deed of a porperty, the said deed remained sacrosanct so long as the rents were paid. On the other hand, the Company's initiative in instilling confidence among the settlers became evident when it arranged for a civil and police administration. Though this system of administration was in a very rudimentary state and no municipal administration was properly initiated, the inhabitants more or less experienced a new air to breathe in. Hence private individuals spent money for the promotion of the town.

Yet unless the rulers take initiative in the activities of construction it is difficult for a settlement to flourish. Before the battle of Palasi, the fort was the only construction which the Company had undertaken. The fort was the bone of contention between the Company and the Nawabs of Bengal. The battle of Palasi removed all such obstructions towards building a new fort. that was the symbol of power, authority and grandure of the Company. And it was the only construction, worthy of its name which had been undertaken by the Company during the entire period of our study. It was not very surprising since the English as a ruler in all parts of India had done the same

thing. Moreover, the other engagements of the Company were too pressing. The conquest of Bengal was viewed as an opportunity to transfer tribute from here to London. The never-ending confusion relating to money and currency made the situation worse. The study of Abdul Majed Khan<sup>41</sup> gives a detailed picture of these. Some Calcutta-based persons, the majority of whom were the Indian banians acquired a huge fortune even by handling and converting the currency.<sup>42</sup> When it was a crisis to the Company, a considerable amount of wealth was under the disposal of a new wealthy persons.

The paucity of fund at the public level was such that the much-desired territorial growth of Calcutta after the battle of Palasi did not materialise. The Company's endeavour in 1717 to acquire 38 villages was urged by reasons of security. But even then the importance of these areas as mines of wealth did not escape the eyes of the Company. Yet the Company failed to do anything in that direction. Even non-availability of a well-defined boundary till 1794 contributed towards the tardy growth of the town. But the possession of the neighbouring areas which may be termed as the suburbs of Calcutta, helped it in many ways. In fact, Calcutta was to a some extent, fed by these suburbs. Those places assumed certain importance for the alleged bad climate and environment of the town proper. Still the town became populous for several reasons. A large number of people who were regularly losing their jobs in the countryside fled to Calcutta for their livelihood. Hence at the one hand, there was a property-owning class and on the other, a class of destitutes. This contrast in population-mix was a character of Calcutta and it went a long way to determine its axis of urban growth.

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41. A. M. Khan, *The Transition In Bengal, 1756-1775 : A Study of Saiyid Md. Reza Khan* (Cambridge, 1969).

42. William Bolts, *Considerations on Indian Affairs ... etc.* (London, 1772) vol. I; pp. 204-05.

# 1

## EARLY RUDIMENTS OF URBAN GROWTH

Calcutta had some situational advantages which did not allow it to be vulnerable to any enemy attack. It was situated on the down-stream of the river Hughli and was very near the sea. Excepting Falta, a Dutch settlement, all the ports were upwards from Calcutta. Since it was the day of adventures and since the merchant marine depended heavily on naval preponderance, Calcutta became a convenient choice for a good settlement. Probably it was a deliberate choice. The need for territory in Bengal had been felt by the English Company long ago. It may not sound improper if we say that trading activities of the East India Company had long been associated with acquisition of Indian territories. It has been claimed by some scholars that the doctrine of Sir Josiah Child, professed in the 1680s ultimately became the sheet-anchor of the Company's colonial expansion in India.<sup>1</sup> It was then seriously believed by the Directors of the East India Company that "If they could hold a fortified town in Bengal for four or five years..., it would soon grow into a magnificent city as Madras then was."<sup>2</sup>

In the minds of the authorities of the Company the considerations for trade had always been primary. Since 1720, the East India Company's exports were in an upward direction. Though with the conclusion of the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle

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1. William J. Barber, *British Economic Thought and India, 1600-1858*. (Oxford, 1975) p. 71.

2. S. Bhattacharyya, *The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1704-1740*. (Calcutta, 1969) p. 15

in 1748, Madras was restored to the English company, the growing French power in the southern India had increasingly become a threat to them. Now the Court of Directors looked towards Calcutta and decided to increase its military strength.<sup>3</sup>

So the die was cast. The fortifications of the Company could instil a sense of security not only among the minds of the traders but also, in the minds of the inhabitants of the settlement. The sudden growth of population in Calcutta in the face of Sova Singh's rebellion<sup>4</sup> was a demonstration of that confidence among the settlers. "Ever since the foundation of Calcutta, a large number of indigenous traders, bankers, as well as members of the landed aristocracy were attracted to the new town."<sup>5</sup> When Bengal experienced a severe devastation due to the Maratha raids in the 1740s, the East India Company at Calcutta could mobilise the mass and raise a fund for digging the Maratha Ditch as a line of first defence. That could not be found anywhere in the province. It will not be out of place to say that even before 1757, the residents of Calcutta had already acquired a status of a privileged and protected people within the province.<sup>6</sup>

One of the major factors of such privilege was the formation of law courts by the Company. The English sense of property was reflected in the judicial administration of Calcutta. "There is no power" which "can constantly deprive" an Englishman from enjoying his fundamental rights. The English had introduced that legal system in Calcutta.<sup>7</sup> One of the major reasons behind

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3. K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760*. (Cambridge, 1978) pp. 66-67.

4. J. C. K. Paterson, *Bengal District Gazetters, Burdwan* (N. Delhi Reprint, 1983) pp. 134-35.

5. N. K. Bose, *Social and Cultural Life of Calcutta* in "Geographical Review of India". Vol. XX (December, 1958) p. 11.

6. P. J. Marshall, *The East India Fortunes...* (Oxford, 1976) p. 112.

7. William Bolts, *Considerations...* (London, 1772) vol. I, p. 76.

the growth of a propertied-class in this town was the sense of confidence derived from the English law and the English judicial system.

### 1. *The Merchant class as developers.*

After the decline of Satgaon, the medieval port of Bengal in the sixteenth century, the trade centre of this part of the province shifted to Hughli in the down stream of the river. More adventurous merchants came down further along the river and developed Betore in Howrah into a big trading mart. "Amongst there was four families of Bysacks and one of Setts who colonised the east bank of the Hughli, just above its junction with the Adi-Ganga, and founded the village of Govindpur. They cleared the jungle, excavated tanks, and built houses for themselves...; and in short space of time they opened, on the north side of Calcutta, a place for the sale of cloth which was soon to become celebrated as Sutanuti Hat, the Cotton-Bale Market."<sup>8</sup> In Calcutta for long, those Indian merchants could enjoy certain degree of "individual freedom" which enabled them to carry on their brisk trade.<sup>9</sup> They were also favoured by the English company in their ventures. That favour extended by the Company was obviously for its own commercial considerations. But behind its actions, certain other motives were also clear. With the reduction of the ground rents for the estates of the Setts in 1707, the Company had initiated a long-drawn process in the urbanisation of the place. The rents were reduced for the considerations that the Setts had developed the place of their habitation.<sup>10</sup> This

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8. C. R. Wilson, *The Early Annals of the English in Bengal* (N. Delhi Reprint, 1983) vol. I. pp. 134-35.

9. Benoy Ghosh, "Some Old Family-Founders in 18th century Calcutta" in *B. P. P.*, Jan.-June, 1960.

10. Wilson, *op. cit.* No. 215.

The Consultation runs, "In consideration that Janundun Seat, Gopaul Seat, Jadoo Seat, Bonarsy Seat, and Jay Kissen will keep in repair the highway between the Fort's land mark to the norward on the backside of the town, we have thought fit to abate them 8 annas in bigha of their garden rent, which is about Rs. 55 in the whole less than it is ordered."

was the beginning of the undertaking of public works by private individuals for which the government now showed its appreciation.

Moreover, the Company's decision to maintain good trade relations with the Indian merchants paid dividends even before the battle of Palasi. Similarly, the Setts acquired a good fortune by working as the brokers of the English company.<sup>11</sup> This smooth relation could not be found in the western coast of India. In Bombay, the English company often had to counteract the Indian offensive against its trading activities.<sup>12</sup> But in Calcutta, the Indians just like the Setts had acted as the brokers of the English till 1741. After the abolition of the brokership they used to work as *dadni* merchants. In the process, Calcutta had witnessed the growth of a rich indigenous merchant class, a considerable number of whom were later known as the banians.

Besides the banians the Company also tried to patronise the weavers in this settlement. As the Company had a brisk business of Indian cotton goods before the battle of Palasi, it needed the artisans to live within its bounds. Hence it decided "to give all Encouragement for Weavers to come and Resort within" its "Precincts".<sup>13</sup> At the one hand, it encouraged the

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11. Benoy Ghosh, *op. cit.* "It is recorded that goods purchased at Calcutta in 1711 for £a 43,000, could be sold in France for more than £ 150,000. It cannot be denied also that, inspite of the private gains of the Setts as brokers and *dadny* merchants, the Company made fabulous profits."
  12. Holden Furber, *Bombay Presidency in Mid-Eighteen Century*. (Bombay, 1965). The trade in Bombay had never been smooth during the 1720s. In 1723-24 two Parsi brothers, Framjee and Bowmanjee Rustumjee who, while acting as brokers of the E. I. Company were accused of engaging in a secret correspondence with the Mughal Governor of Surat to get the Company's trading privileges revoked. A third brother, Naorojee Rustumjee even went to England in the winter of 1723-24 to petition the Court of Directors for the release of his brother, Bowmanjee, who had been arrested in Bombay. pp. 3-4.
  13. C. R. Wilson, *Old Fort William in Bengal*, (London, 1906) vol. II. No. 253.  
In Madras also, the Company built the village of "Chintadrepettah" for the weavers' settlement. C. S. Srinivasachari, *History of the City of Madras: Written for the Tercentenary Celebration Committee*, 1939. (Madras, 1939) pp. 140-50.

artisans to settle within its bounds and on the other, it gave protection to the banians. From the research of N. K. Sinha it is clear that even prior to the battle of Palasi, the banians were protected by the Company's judiciary.<sup>14</sup>

After the battle of Palasi, the business of the Indians showed signs of decline. Though initially the banians could gather considerable profit because their European masters were prohibited from trading in salt, betelnut and tobacco, they had been losing ground day after day. The matter was such that in 1763, only Bulaqi Das was considered as a merchant at the Company's quarters, who had an aptitude for business.<sup>15</sup> When this was the situation a good number of them started investing money in farming the *zamindaries* in the districts. But probably the most lucrative investment was to loan out money to the Europeans. It had become such that the rich Indians were often ready to lose interests in doing so.<sup>16</sup> Presenting his arguments P. J. Marshall says at length that the Company's judiciary could instill a certain degree of confidence as well as faith among the Indian investors which had ultimately led them to settle in Calcutta and offer loans to the Europeans.<sup>17</sup> His arguments has been corroborated by some contemporary judicial records also.<sup>18</sup>

It is a fact that those banians had started accumulating huge resources for a pretty long period. As they were gradually removed from the field of trade consequent to the political

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14. N. K. Sinha, "The Mayor's Court Records (1749-74)" in *B. P. P.* vol. LXIX, No. 132; 1950.

15. *C. P. C.* vol. I. No. 1925.

16. P. J. Marshall, *op. cit.* p. 42.

17. *Ibid.* p. 32.

18. Some *Mayor's Court* Records can be cited here ;  
 In 1767, Bancharam Sircar vs. Nathaniel William Price.  
 In 1767, Govind Chund Seat vs. Romuldo Johnson.  
 In 1771, Kissenchurn Tagore vs. Peter Reed.  
 In 1773, Collychurn Banyan vs. Edward Tiretta.



upheaval in the country they had very little area where they could invest their money. Now in the changed circumstances, they were considerably attracted towards land and properties. And this was observed by no less a person than Warren Hastings himself.<sup>19</sup>

Since the acquisition of *Diwani*, the revenue of the province was the main concern for the administration of the East India Company. So always it wanted to have a secured coffer. That coffer was to be provided by the revenues of this province. So the Company decided to let the *zamindaries* into farm to the highest bidders. Since the very beginning the rich Indians of Calcutta had demonstrated their zeal for farming. In 1759, out of 15 lots of the neighbouring 24 Parganas altogether 12 were farmed by the Calcutta banians.<sup>20</sup> In a recent article it has been shown how Darpanarain Tagore, a Calcutta merchant accumulated huge fortune as the *naib* of Maharaja Krishna Chandra of Nadia. The Maharaja had a *zamindary* running up to the Sundarbans and areas adjacent to Calcutta.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, a large number of these rich men farmed the lucrative *zamindaries* in the neighbouring districts.<sup>22</sup>

Calcutta did not escape the eyes of these people. In 1767, Maharaja Nabakrishna and Gokul Ghosal had entered into an agreement and jointly proposed to farm the town of Calcutta with its suburbs, the 15 *Dihis* for three years.<sup>23</sup> They offered to pay the Company thirteen lakhs of rupees per annum which was far more than the actual receipts of the Company.

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19. Warren Hastings, *The Present State of the East Indies*. (London, 1786) p. 12.

20. N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal etc.*, vol. II. (Calcutta, 1968) p. 24.

21. S. C. Nandy, "Darpanarain Tagore; A Short Note." In *B. P. P.* vol. C. Pt. I. No. 190 (Jan.-June, 1981).

22. N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, vol. II. p. 78.

23. *Home (Public) Progs.* 20.8.1767.

Though the offer was rejected,<sup>24</sup> it was by then evident how much resource the rich Indians had under their disposal. Taking the clue from the observations made by Hastings, we may say that these rich people had taken serious interest in owning properties in Calcutta.

## 2. *The Property Right.*

It is believed by some that since the East India Company had taken a serious interest in owning lands and real estates the importance of Calcutta vis-a-vis Madras or Bombay grew immensely.<sup>25</sup> Clive's treaty with Mir Jafar had made the Company's position sound. Its possessions in Calcutta became secured.<sup>26</sup> Since the Englishmen placed too much importance in clear title of a property the Company was also cautious in obtaining such a right in whole of Calcutta. Similarly, as the holder of *zamindari* even prior to the battle of Palasi the Company tried to honour the rights and privileges of the land-holders within its bounds through the formation of the Mayor's Court in 1727.

After the battle of Palasi and more accurately after the acquisition of *Diwani* the Company's need of money was multiplied. The history of the Company's administration in Bengal is a story of systematic extractions of its wealth. The extraction in the form of a drain as calculated by N. K. Sinha, amounted to the total investments of the English, the Dutch, the French and the Danes and even others. It was computed

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24. *Selections*. No. 951.

25. C. Northcote Parkinson. *Trade in the Eastern Seas, 1793-1813*. (Cambridge, 1937) p. 30.

26. C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, And Sunnuds Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*. (Calcutta, 1862) vol. I. No. III. Article 8 runs, "Within the ditch, which surrounds the borders of Calcutta, are tracts of land, belonging to several Zamindars; besides this I will grant the English Company six hundred yards without the ditch."

that since then the usual annual imports of bullion of about £ 780,000 was lost to Bengal. Between 1708 and 1756, the English Company alone brought bullion worth £ 283,843 into Bengal. But between 1757 and 1797, there was hardly any such import.<sup>27</sup> To run its trade and above all, to remit the annual tribute to the King in England, the Company required to mobilise the resources under its command. Probably its efforts to raise funds by issuing promissory notes did not evoke much response. The admission of Hastings<sup>28</sup> also proves this fact. Hence the only way left before the Company was to raise revenue by any means.

When its dependence on this revenue increased suddenly for the sake of its trade, the Company needed a guaranteed collection. The collections could be made secured as and when there was an assured remittance from the landholders. To achieve this position, land was an essential pre-requisite. Hence one of the principal efforts of the Company was, to raise confidence among the landholders of its settlement in the effect that they would not lose ownership of land if they regularly discharged their dues to the government. This confidence among owners of property went long way to create the condition for town building in Calcutta.

It has been stressed in recent researches that the eighteenth century British thought relating to property was dominated by the writings of Locke. When the English introduced that concept in this country, the entire system of landholding witnessed a change. "For Locke, private ownership was a law of nature. While the earth was given in common to all men, 'every man has a Property in his own Person,' and no one else had any claim on this property but himself." This was alien in India where the concept of such private ownership had been absent. The

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27. N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, vol. I. (Calcutta, 1981) pp. 12-13. K. K. Datta, *Survey of India's Social Life and Economic Conditions in the 18th century (1707-1813)*. (Calcutta, 1961) p. 138.

28. Warren Hastings, *op. cit.* p. 12.

sense of such ownership gave a boost to the people in owning land.<sup>29</sup>

Security of ownership was provided by a document of particular nature as was the custom in India. This document of ownership of property was *patta* issued from the office of the Collector. It was clearly written in the said *patta* how much an owner of land should pay to the government.<sup>30</sup> But the Collector "have no official authority to grant the Pottah (*patta*) without receiving an Equivalent."<sup>31</sup> This meant that all transfers of holdings had to be made through the said office and each and every transfer had to be registered.<sup>32</sup> So unless the title deed was produced by the holder, no transfer was treated valid. Even the Company itself did not deviate from this settled principle when it took hold of some properties.<sup>33</sup>

It can also be said that the instrument of property was the *patta*. A holder of a promises could express his ownership on the same by producing a *patta* in his own name. So the official policy was that, every landholder must have a *patta* in his own name.<sup>34</sup> If the *patta* got lost the ownership on the said land could be disputed. "If the ground remained empty (*for*) three years and the rent not paid at the following General measurement (made at the end of every ten years) the ground

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29. A. T. Embree, "Landholding in India and British Institutions" in Robert E. Frykenberg ed., *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*. (N. Delhi, 1979).

30. C. R. Wilson, *The Early Annals*, vol. I. No. 205. Consultation of 12th June 1707 runs that "That the rent-gatherers or the zemindar (zamindar) do give the inhabitant a puta (*patta*) or ticket with a note affixed to it for the amount of rent he shall pay annually."

31. C. O. R. Progs. 3.4.1786.

32. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 10.2.1789.

33. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 15.2.1779.

34. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 23.4.1789.

is written (*sic*) in the records as Company's Comar." This meant the resumption of that holding by the Company.<sup>35</sup> At no cost a piece of land could be left unproductive for more than three years. The Company conducted regular measurements in the town. Every measurement was followed by the preparation of new *pattas*.<sup>36</sup> Those measurements were started from 1724 and were regularly conducted after the interval of every ten years. As the rent was to be collected from every *patta*-holder<sup>37</sup> nobody could escape. If a landholder failed to remit his dues by the scheduled time before such measurements, he was to lose his occupancy rights over his property and, by that way the ownership too. To keep the landholders under pressure and to collect rents in time the policy of the Company's government was no doubt, fruitful. When the Governor General-in Council was made supreme in all revenue matters, the hold of the Company on land was tightened. But the landholders were not stripped of everything. They were afforded with security under the dictum of natural justice. The Company allowed the landholders to defend themselves in the court of law against any official action.<sup>38</sup> This was one reason which helped people to invest money in Calcutta.

For the default in payment of official dues, a property could be attached and, be sold out to recover the same.<sup>39</sup>

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35. C. O. R. Progs. 3.9.1781.

36. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 10.2.1789.

37. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 8.9.1790.

38. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 2.3.1787.

39. *Judicial (Civil) Progs.* 14.3.1794. It was decided on 14th March 1794, by the Governor General-in-Council to enact a new law by which the arrears could be realised easily. Hence, the Regulation III came into operation. It was clearly stated that the collectors "are not to cause any actual Proprietor of Land to be confined for arrears of Revenue . . . , having resolved that no Proprietor of Land shall be imprisoned for arrears of Public Revenue who has landed property which if sold will be sufficient to make good the deficiency."

Previous to this practice, a holder with the exception of certain European nationals, had been confined for the same act. Under the new policy of the government for recovering dues, the property could be sold easily.

But in no case, the action taken by the Company was rash. Extreme precaution in case of attachments of properties or issue of distress warrants was one of the basic policies of the Company. In all cases relating to distress sale etc., the Collector was asked to maintain extreme caution.<sup>40</sup>

The Company was aware of the fact that the owners used to treat their properties inseparable from their families. When the properties were put on sale for any of such reasons as default, mortgage etc., the presentation of the *pattas* of such properties were essential. Generally in such cases of distress sale, the defaulter or judgement-debtor refused to surrender the *patta* of the impugned properties. Though the property was sold out the purchaser failed to get the *patta*. And there was no law by which the Collector could issue a new *patta* without taking the previous one. In such cases "it must be the interest of Government to Support Titles so fairly acquired as those of Lands . . . , and without which Government will lose its Rents." To save the coffer and also to enforce payments from the new owners in such cases, it was decided to issue advertisements seeking any claim or objection from any quarter before issuing a new *patta*.<sup>41</sup>

Broadly speaking it is an accepted practice that by the amount of rents received from land, the nature and value of land is ascertained. Karl Marx's definition of "the exploitation of the earth for the purpose of reproduction or extraction"<sup>42</sup>

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40. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 2.3.1787.

41. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 11.2.1778.

42. Karl Marx, *Capital* (Moscow, 1986) vol. III. p. 774.

was also relevant in Calcutta's case. Here the 'extraction' made by the Company was rent. In cases of default the distress sale paved the way for 'reproduction.'

For such extractions the relationship between land and its holder was vital. If occupants of properties could be assured of their stability the chance for reproduction became brighter. And that acted as a boon to a stationary population. This was one of the principles which the Company followed strictly in Calcutta. So it was not astonishing when we find it legalising those illegal occupants of the Company's 'Comar' ground on payment of "a reasonable price for the same."<sup>43</sup> Probably the Company knew that the said "reasonable price" would in course of time fetch higher price. By this act the market price of land and properties could be enhanced.

The value of land could be enhanced by human hands. Hence possession and also the occupancy rights assumed such an importance in Calcutta that often those could nullify the official grants also. The official grants relating to a piece of land was treated valid as and when the grantee secured possession of the same. Colonel Watson was granted land in Kidderpur by the Company to construct his dockyard there. In a later date one Jagannath Sarkar established a bazar on some part of land originally granted to the Colonel. Jagannath claimed of having procured another grant from Watson. But this was challenged by Charles Watt in a subsequent date when he purchased the estates of Colonel Watson. The dispute was ultimately disposed of in the Supreme Court, where it was proved that Watson had never occupied the disputed premises. Hence any grant relating to the same by Watson was not valid."<sup>44</sup>

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The basic principle behind such regards for the rights of the occupiers was that through the enjoyment of such a

43. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 13.1.1789.

44. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 17.9.1789 and 2.11. 1789.

right an occupier could develop his relation with the land. By this way lands would be developed in course of time. As no plot except some select *lakheraj* (or rent-free land) holding was free from rent, it was natural that landholders should try to develop those for getting best returns. Following that idea, the Company in 1790, decided to dispose of all the 'Comar' lands in the town.<sup>45</sup>

The landholders also enjoyed a certain amount of freedom in choosing their properties. In principle all were allowed the right of easy transfer within the town. "That when the Riots (*sic*) find any Inconvenience from remaining on his Ground, on acquainting the Committee (*of Revenue*) thereof they may be permitted to go where they please."<sup>46</sup> By this way the Company left the development works on the holders of land. Another and the most important purpose was to fetch a five per cent tax on the sale-price of a premises. Everyone knew that the developed estates should attract higher prices and in consequence higher taxes. The said tax was always seen as burdensome to the purchasers. Already in July 1753, Holwell had suggested the reduction of tax on the sale prices of the houses belonging to the Europeans.<sup>47</sup> One of the ideas behind this suggestion was to facilitate smooth transfer of properties among the Europeans and, to help in growing their numbers in Calcutta.

When the payments of rent was the sole stipulation for the enjoyment of property-rights, the holders were protected in realising the benefits as much as they could do from their holdings. Hence they were free to utilise their respective premises

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45. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 14.6.1790. The Collector of the town in his letter to the Board, dated 5th June 1790, mentioned: "The Company having granted on perpetual Leases most of the Lands in Calcutta, and Punchwangong, are still possessed of many portions of Ground denominated Comar." He was directed to dispose of them all.

46. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 26.8.1776.

47. *F.W.I.H.* vol. I. Letter to the Court, dated 4.1.1754. para, 116.



for the best they could. While delivering his minute on the complaint of Maharaja Nabakrishna against Madan Datta for erection of an "illegal" bazar in Sutanuti, Vansittart the then President of the Calcutta Committee also admitted this right of the landholders in Calcutta.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, a landholder could mortgage his property at his own will. Once mortgaged, the claim of the mortgagee was always considered to be a superior one. To avoid a distress sale due to default in payment of rent, a person executed a mortgage of his property even in fictitious name. In that case also, the public demand was set aside in face of the mortgagee's claim.<sup>49</sup> So the immovable property acquired a status of commodity which could be sold or transferred freely. This smooth transfer of ownerships was then required to attract settlers from various parts into Calcutta.

### 3. *The Grant to Nabakrishna.*

One of the basic principles to enhance the value of land as defined by Karl Marx was to improve its ground rent.<sup>50</sup> As a colonial ruler it was also the fundamental policy of the East India Company to fetch rents as high as possible without investing anything. To run an administration and to make such arrangements as would prove itself conducive towards an urban growth, the Company's involvements should have been higher. That it hardly could afford when its financial position was not so healthy. So it looked around for certain solution.

The *talukdary* grant of Sutanuti along with its *hats* and bazars and of Bag Bazar to Maharaja Nabakrishna in 1777, was nothing but the virtual transfer of revenue administration from the Company to a private individual for uninterrupted return. When the Company's policy was to protect the individual property right, this very grant created a superior lordship on some

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48. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 16.12.1778.

49. *C. O. R. Progs.* 12.11.1781

50. Karl Marx. *op. cit.* p. 774.

individual holders. Moreover, Sutanuti had its own character, it being the place of habitation of the indigenous population for long. The grant to Nabakrishna proved his influence over the Company's officials. Nabakrishna represented such new band of urban money-elite which had its root closely connected with the Company.

But the residents' concern regarding their individual right was distinctly exhibited. In a joint petition addressed to the Governor General-in-Council, the residents and landholders of Sutanuti and Bag Bazar strongly opposed such a grant to Nabakrishna. They claimed to be the "proprietors of their Land and Houses" and had been enjoying "the Liberty of disposing of them with the approbation of the Company, and exercising every other right of Property over them." They had apprehensions that as the successor of the Company, Nabakrishna would enjoy and exercise all the executive and judicial authority so long exercised by the Company's government itself.<sup>51</sup> The right to hold property had by then, made the inhabitants in Calcutta so much conscious that the Company had to spell out that there was a judiciary to protect them against any sort of infringement.

But to Nabakrishna, the *talukdary* grant meant the confirmation of property rights. Nabakrishna had his *zamindari* at Ichhapur and Nawab Gunj in the north 24 Parganas which had been acquired by the Company. This made the Maharaja aggrieved.<sup>52</sup> Hence he was granted the *talukdary* in Calcutta "in exchange for the village Noapara (*sic*) & c."<sup>53</sup> But the Company was cautious that the said grant should not "affect the property or Rights of others."<sup>54</sup> During that time Hastings

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51. Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs. 23.1.1778.

52. Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs. 5.12.1777.

53. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. typed vol. 8.1.1778.

54. Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs. 5.12.1777.

made it clear that Nabakrishna "shall so behave himself as to secure the satisfaction and Content of the Riotts and other inhabitants."<sup>55</sup> In face of repeated representations to revoke the grant to Nabakrishna, Hastings assured those who agitated that Nabakrishna, "has no power to oppress, or to extract new Taxes, or to erect a Court of Justice."<sup>56</sup>

Whether the said grant could distinctly divide the function and authority of the government and the *talukdar*, is difficult to determine. Nabakrishna always tried to exert his authority as the sole owner of the *taluk*. And here lies the crux of the problem.

One of the ideas behind the said grant to Nabakrishna was, that he should develop the place. Since the Company exhibited little concern for the development of the town the entire onus was left to the occupiers of the lands and properties. Hastings did not forget to remind this to Nabakrishna and that was the basic reason behind the said grant to him. Nabakrishna was to pay a fixed *jumma* of Rs. 1237-1-13-10 per annum and, "by his good management cause a daily increase (*sic*) of Husbandry and prosperity."<sup>57</sup> Hence with this grant the Company deliberately decided to transfer its responsibilities for the management of a vast area to a private person. Nabakrishna in turn decided to utilise this as a grant of ownership on the *taluk* though in practical purposes it was not so.

#### 4. *Protection of property-right.*

When it is said that the right of holding property was protected in Calcutta it meant that it was protected by the judiciary. Though the Governor General-in-Council had asupreme authority relating to revenues, they could not act whimsically. One of the basic changes brought by the English in the fields

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55. Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs. 16.1.1778.

56. Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs. typed vol. 28.4.1778.

57. Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs. 16.1.1778.

of landholding was, the absolute security to the holder. As we have seen the Company's administrators in Calcutta had been influenced by the change in ideas which had been taking place in contemporary England. A landholder at Calcutta was given liberty to move before the court of law to challenge any executive action just like an Englishman in England.

For long the judiciary in Calcutta had been trying to exert its authority as an independent body. It is very difficult to assess how much knowledge the judges of the Mayor's Court and the Supreme Court did really possess relating to the law and custom of this country. But that did not refrain them from exercising their judicial authority within their local jurisdiction in Calcutta.<sup>58</sup> By their acts they had established a separate administration which ran parallel to the Nawab's authority and the said position was never altered even after 1757. As a matter of fact, the formation of the Supreme Court in 1774, opened a series of conflicts between it and the administration relating to the right of property. We have a well-documented history of the same.<sup>59</sup>

The civil as well as will and testamentary jurisdiction of the Mayor's Court even before 1757 had enabled it to exert its authority over land and properties in the town of Calcutta. While granting probate to a will, the court confirmed a succession to an estate and, all such successions could only be challenged in the said court. So the confirmation of a property right and disputes about that—both were to be judged by none other than this court.

As the disposer of all civil matters, the Mayor's Court had acquired such power by which it could attach a property without any executive concurrence even before the battle of Palasi.<sup>60</sup>

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58. *Selections*. No. 179.

59. for details see I. B. Banerjee, *The Supreme Court in Conflict*. (Calcutta no date).

60. *F. W. I. II*. vol. I. Letter to the Court, dated 11.9.1755. para, 24.

With the formation of the Supreme Court at Calcutta in 1774, the conflict between the executive and judiciary relating to revenue matters deepened. "The view of the Court was that, as 'oppressions and extortions represented in England to have been exercised by the officers of the collections, whether truly or falsely, were one principal reason for the establishment of the Court,' it was certainly their duty to entertain suits against officers charged with such irregular and oppressive acts."<sup>61</sup>

During the entire period of our study, Calcutta witnessed conflicts between various departments and courts relating to revenue matters. Though it was declared time and again that the Governor General-in-Council was supreme regarding this, the niceties of law created troubles of various natures. The judges of the Supreme Court were usually at logger-heads with the executive. This was one of the unique features of the colonial rule in Calcutta in its formative phase. It was once confirmed that the Collector's *katcharry* and the *Diwani Adalat* in Calcutta would settle disputes relating to landholdings, *pattas* and revenues.<sup>62</sup> But the authority of the Supreme Court to settle all disputes relating to civil matters, enabled it to extend its jurisdiction. If any matter fell within the jurisdiction of both the *Sadar Diwani Adalat* and the Supreme Court then, the jurisdiction of the former was "ipso facto abolished."<sup>63</sup> To give the people confidence in the new court, Hastings caused a digest of the Hindu Law to be prepared by ten of the most learned *pundits* in the province. The codifications were required to acquaint the judges of the Court with the Hindu family laws. So in the one hand the Court acted as the protector of the property rights from the actions of executives and, in the other, helped to make transfers of such rights by way of successions and inheritance.

But the major reform introduced by the Supreme Court was the creation of English sense of property rights in this country.

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61. I. B. Banerjee, *op. cit.* p. 32.

62. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 20.5.1774.

63. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 23.5.1775.

We have already noticed how the metamorphosis in the social and political life of England had helped the English people to look at the rights of property in a different way. The officials of the Company had thought that in India, the ultimate ownership of land belonged to the sovereign. But they were not ready to accept this maxim. The creation of individual property rights in Calcutta even before the battle of Palasi was needed to ignore the said authority of the sovereign, i.e. ; the Nawab of the *Subah*.

In course of time and after the settlement of the English in increasing number the sense of such private property spread its root deep into social psychology. In a letter, the Commissioner of Law Suits expressed this view very clearly. He advocated in favour of such English sense of rights which should enable the landholders to fight the administrative whims.<sup>64</sup>

It is incorrect to conclude that the benevolent nature of the colonial rule was exhibited in such manner. The practice of honouring the property rights was simply followed to fetch higher dividends. It was thought that even by the year 1769, the "Number of Inhabitants have increased" and that was because of the "better Security of their Property."<sup>65</sup> No doubt, this sense of security was the creation of the judiciary. The right of a property owner was so sacrosanct that entering into a house without the prior permission from its owner could

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64. N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History* etc. vol. II. "The Commissioner of Law Suits wrote in December 1778 : 'As soon as the status and rights of a zamindar are clearly fixed and explained to the lawyers in the Court, they will by analogy class him with some kind of tenure in England and conduct the suits not according to the principles of this Government but by the authorities and maxims which the law of England has laid down with regard to such tenures.'" pp. 19-20.

65. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 7. Letter from the Court, dated 30.6.1769. para, 13.

invite litigation.<sup>66</sup> In a suit, it was complained by a person that the defendant of that suit had forcibly entered into the plaintiff's house "without any reasonable Cause and against the Law of England."<sup>67</sup> By this way trespassing was considered to be an infringement of property-right.

The court's intervention in favour of property-owners in all complaints lodged there had provided an extra-ordinary security to them. Often this also led to the hesitations among official circles with regard to taking any decision. When the *chowkedarry* tax was imposed in Calcutta in 1773, the officials were too much apprehensive for an impending court injunction against them. The Company in initial stages failed to recover a huge arrear of rent as the *chowkedarry* tax was merged with the rent. This was because the landholders refused to pay the both. As the *chowkedarry* tax had been imposed without their consent, the Company failed to compel them to pay it. Hence a method to prosecute them in the Supreme Court was initiated. Sending of peons for collections of the dues or for attachment

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66. *Supreme Court (Plea Side) 1778.*

Ramnaut Chatterjee vs. William Wodsworth.

The plaintiff complained that the defendant with Settaram Gose had forcibly entered into the dwelling house of the plaintiff with swords, knives etc. and "Disturbed him in his quiet possession and Occupation there of and against the Will and Consent" of the plaintiff. Hence, the plaintiff claimed a compensation of Rs. 50,000.

*Supreme Court (Plea Side) 1781.*

John Doe vs. Gower Hurry Day.

Here the plaintiff claimed damage of A. Rs. 1000, as the defendant had forcibly entered into his land measuring only one *cottah* at Malanga.

*Supreme Court (Plea Side) 1793.*

Robert Allen vs. John Lennon.

The Plaintiff alleged that the defendant had illegally entered into his house and severely assaulted him. Hence a claim of S. Rs. 5000.

67. *Supreme Court (Plea Side) 1778.*

Joindy Serang vs. Titto Serang.

Here it was complained that the defendant had entered into the plaintiff's house without his consent and against the Law of England imprisoned him for 6 hours. The plaintiff claimed a damage of S. Rs. 1000,

of the properties were expected to create some grave troubles for the government. The landlords in such events could institute suits of trespass against the officials. So in any case, the only way left before it was to institute suits against the defaulters.<sup>68</sup>

Though sometimes the Collector detained the "natives" for default in payments of rent, he was to act under great caution. The Supreme Court regularly issued the writ of *Habeas Corpus* if a person under its jurisdiction was arrested by the government. Initially the non-payment of rent led to the confinement of a landholder. So whenever possible a confined defaulter either brought a charge of trespass or a writ of *Habeas Corpus*. Certainly, all these were not preferred by the government. And such frequent interference by the court was resented by the officials.<sup>69</sup>

But the court was to act and it was meant to act to uphold such right of life and property. The judges of the Supreme Court understood that like England the judiciary in this country was to act as a safeguard to the landowners against any official oppression.<sup>70</sup> The inhabitants of Calcutta were the first to witness such a change in their age-long practice. It was also seen by the judges of the court that the law-abiding landholders were not harassed by the government. For this, it was made a rule that a landholder should produce his *patta* to initiate a proceeding relating to same.<sup>71</sup> If it was once established by a litigant that he possessed a valid *patta* and was aggrieved, his complaints were taken care of. Similarly, his right to issue *patta* to his tenants was also admitted.<sup>72</sup> Ultimately, for the legal protection, this town attracted a good number of rich persons

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68. C. O. R. Progs. 12.9.1781.

69. Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs. 6.3.1778.

70. I. B. Banerjee, *op. cit.* p. 32.

71. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 9.11.1778.

72. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 27.11.1778.



to settle here. As a person could possess as much land as he could in Calcutta,<sup>73</sup> major portion of its land was occupied by those rich men.

#### 5. *Growth of large estates.*

The most vital protection offered to the landowners in Calcutta was the right of easement. It is very difficult to say definitely whether the said right had earlier been enjoyed by the landowners in this country. This right of easement can be claimed by a landowner upon the lands adjoining to his premises. This can be a right of passage or the right of enjoyment of air and light. So by its nature, the right of easement is very complex as well as sensitive.

The judiciary acts as the best guarantee to the enjoyment of this right. And in Calcutta's case we find the Supreme Court upholding this right. It is not possible to say whether the Mayor's Court did also act on this matter. The non-availability of such documents is our problem in arriving at a conclusion prior to the formation of the Supreme Court. The officials of the Company did not have a clear idea regarding this right of easement in Calcutta. By the law of England, it required at least twenty years of undisputed possession over a piece of land not belonged to the landowner claiming it as a proof of the said right. But there was no such hard and fast rule, as believed by the officials of the Company, in this country. The interpretation of the Commissioner of Law Suits was that in India the time limit was much shorter. Most probably, if a landowner could prove his inconvenience without enjoying the said right, he was allowed to exercise it.<sup>74</sup>

Similar to the right of easement, the landowners in Calcutta also enjoyed the right of pre-emption. Here this right was exercised

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73. *Supreme Court (Plea Side)* 1778.  
John Doe vs. Sauchy Rour.

74. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 16.11.1778.

in various ways. But usually this right was enjoyed by a landowner for purchasing an adjoining property. In a sense, in such cases the right of easement and pre-emption were both allied with each other. This right of pre-emption was not an innovation of the colonial rulers. In fact, they extended this right in Calcutta among those who had not enjoyed the same earlier. Primarily this right had been enjoyed by the Indians of this town for long. The Europeans also demanded the same<sup>75</sup> and they were allowed.

The right of pre-emption was termed as "*Huck Shuffy*" meaning a clear right. If a landowner during the sale or even after it of an adjoining premises, could prove this that, the transfer of the impugned premises to a new-comer would infringe his privileges, he was allowed to buy the said premises. There was no limitation in acquiring properties by utilising the right of pre-emption. A landowner could claim this right even on the 'Comar'\* land in Calcutta. In face of claim preferred by adjoining landowner of the right of pre-emption on the 'Comar' land, the government had to sale the same to him.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, when Kamini Raur, the poor widow of one Jaan Mohammad proved her claim over a piece of land occupied by her neighbour, she was restored with its possession.<sup>77</sup>

One thing was clear that if a person could buy some properties in any locality of Calcutta, he was privileged to extend his possession by exercising these two rights. The interpretations of both these were so complex that often these led to a show of force. One or two incidents may be referred to here in order to understand the matter. One Ratan Manik Das purchased 14 *cottah* land from one Ram Chandra Biswas in Sutanuti. Then he built his house there. But one Tilakram Sarkar suddenly

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\* 'Comar' meaning vested land

75. *Cal. C. O R. Progs.* typed vol. 29.8.1775.

76. *C. O. R. Progs.* 24.3.1786, *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 12.6.1787 and 26.6.1787.

77. *The Superintendent of Khalsa Progs.* vol. I. dated 2.3.1773.

appeared in the scene and pulled down the entire structure erected by Ratan Manik. Now he proceeded to build up his own house on the same land. The right of ownership was disputed.<sup>78</sup> Interestingly enough, no government agency or authority like the Collector of the town did appear in the scene to resolve the dispute nor did the parties move before the court of law. Apparently such an incident indicates that ordinary people too often had to succumb to their rich neighbours who used to move before the court too often. In another incident, the helplessness of the Collector in apprehension of a legal action was clear. The Collector failed to resolve the dispute between one Kali Charan Haldar and one Mr. Jacob over the possession of only 7 *chittaks* of land and referred the matter to the Supreme Court.<sup>79</sup>

The rights of easement and of pre-emption were utilised by a rich landholder class in Calcutta. If the list supplied by Pradip Sinha<sup>80</sup> is an indication then the nature of ownership of properties in Calcutta can be guessed. The richmen utilised the system as much as they could. First, a person's right of ownership was guaranteed once he occupied the property and, paid rent to the authority. Secondly, a person could possess as much land as he wished. Thirdly, by using the rights of easement and pre-emption the same person could purchase as much land as possible. Fourthly, taking advantage of the regulation relating to the removal of the thatched houses in the town<sup>81</sup> resourceful persons often grabbed vacant lands and extended their personal estates in accordance with their individual wish. For all these reasons, Calcutta had witnessed the growth of some sprawling estates. This was the pull factor which inspired people to settle in this town.

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78. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 1.8.1776.

79. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 2.2.1798.

80. P. Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History* (Calcutta, 1978) Appendix, III

81. *C. O. R. Progs.* 3.10.1782.

## 6. *Division on racial line.*

Moreover the presence of those rights gave the ultimate shape of the town. Calcutta in the second half of the eighteenth century was divided into two broad zones namely, the 'White Town' and the Indian town, called the 'Black Town'. These were again sub-divided into some small zones. The Europeans dominated the heart of the town where the old fort stood and where the great tank was situated. The northern part of the town which mainly comprised of Sutanuti was the home of the Indians. Between these two zones stood the "Grey Town" comprising a cosmopolitan population.<sup>82</sup>

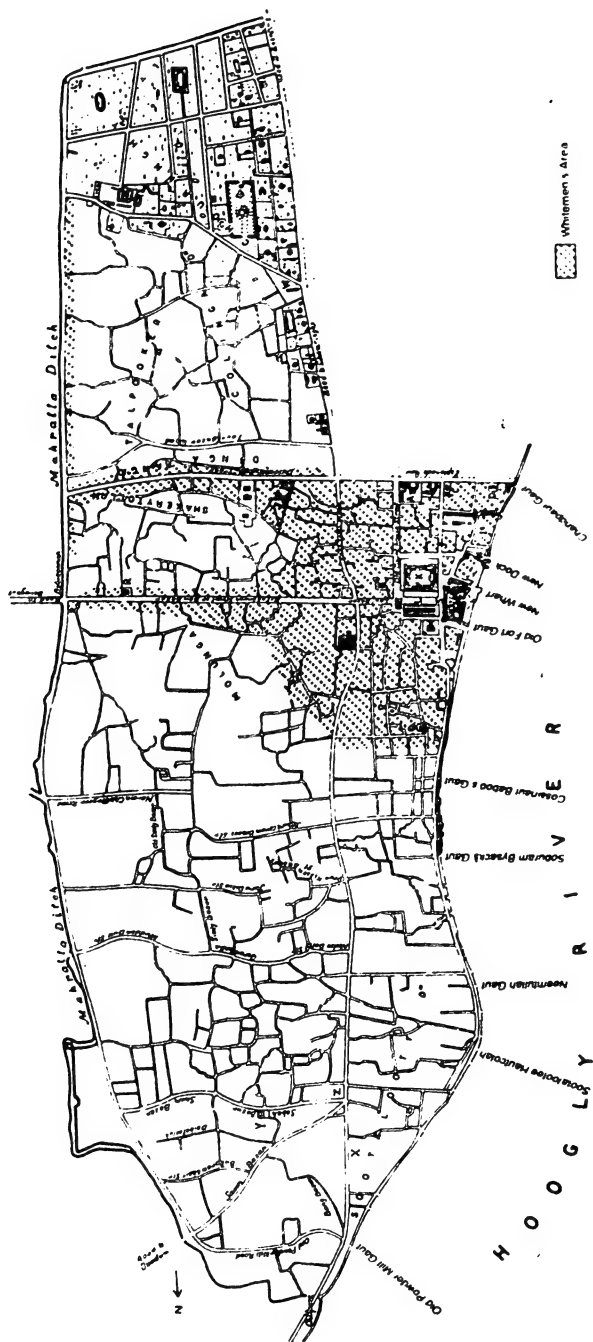
The Englishmen's choice to settle around the old fort is easily understandable because they used to look upon the fort as their saviour in any impending danger. "Between 1726 and 1737 Chherangi (Chaurangi) came to be treated as a part of the English settlement. It was still separated on the west from Govindapur by a tigerhaunted jungle, where now the grassy level of the Maidan extends. The creek wandering inland past the southern wall of the burying ground (now the place is adjacent to the St. John's Church) divided Chowringhee and Govindapur from the English town and the still native portion of Dhee and Bazar Calcutta."<sup>83</sup> The entire zone was initially fenced. The Indians were not allowed there. Quoting Hyde, A. K. Ray writes, "The railing within these defence of the town, still remains in the following circuit of streets : Fancy Lane, Larkin's Lane, British Indian Street, Mango Lane, Mission Row, Lall Bazar, Radha Bazar, Ezra Street, Amratolla Street, Aga Kesbulia Mahommed Lane, Portuguese Church Lane, Armenian Street, and Bonfield's Lane."<sup>84</sup> Gradually the Europeans extended their territory in the southern direction along the Chowringhee.

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82. P. Sinha, *op. cit.* In this book Sinha has dealt on this line.

83. A. K. Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta* ed. by N. R. Ray, (Calcutta, 1982) p. 97.

84. *Ibid.* p. 100.



The 'White Town,' based on the map drawn by Lt. Ccl. Mark Wood in 1784-85

Here again the same old nature of their settlement can be revealed. They extended their area towards the new fort and its nearby places.

It is said that in the middle of the eighteenth century, Holwell had divided the town into certain districts in accordance with caste line like, *Kumartuli* (a settlement of potters), *Collotola* (a settlement for oil-pressures), etc.<sup>85</sup> From the available records this division of town cannot be corroborated. Those could not remain in tact after the sack of Calcutta in 1756 even if built by Holwell earlier. During those two or three fateful days of June, 1756, both the English and the Nawab's army made excessive damage to the Indian part i.e., the northern part of the town.<sup>86</sup> How far those devastated areas were restored again on occupational lines of settlement, is difficult to determine.

The plan of settlement in Calcutta as drawn up by Mark Wood in the 1780s gives the same picture of racial division. The concentration of the Indians in the northern part, chiefly in Sutanuti might have been started with the coming of the Setts there. The English had erected their fort and factory in the middle of the town keeping the Indians into two flanks one at the north, i.e., Sutanuti and a part of Bazar Calcutta and, the other at the south, i.e. Gobindapur. With the dismantling of Gobindapur, the entire settlement was removed from there. The Company did not prefer the Indians to settle within their zone which was to be well guarded. When the new fort was undertaken, the jungles in Chowringhee were cleared and a vast open space was created facing the said fort on the one hand and the Chowringhee on the other. The English did not allow the Indians to settle in this place too

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85. A. Poddar, *Renaissance in Bengal, Quests and Confrontations. 1800-1860*. (Simla, 1970) pp. 229-31. P. Sinha, "Approaches to Urban History I Calcutta (1750-1850) in *B. P. P.* vol. LXXXVII, Pt. I. No ; 163 ; January-June, 1968.

86. J. N. Sarker ed. *The History of Bengal* (Dacca. 1976) vol. II. pp. 474-75.

though a good number of houses in this area were owned by the Indians in the last century. Those were acquired through mortgage etc.,

The problem is to identify the actual reasons for such zonal divisions of the town. The presence of the rights of easement and of pre-emption were two basic protections for maintaining this sort of zonal divisions. Particularly, the right of pre-emption divided the town into certain zones, based on racial or communal lines. One Gour Sil once complained against Kasinath Babu for selling his house in a Hindu locality to a Muslim "without giving notice to the Neighbours who by established Custom" were entitled to the right of pre-emption. The Calcutta Committee of Revenue decided that, "the Neighbours shall have the preference of the Purchase on repaying the price given by the Mussulman and that the seller shall be answerable for every other Expence as the sale was contrary to Regulation, and the Custom of the Country."<sup>87</sup> Hence, the scope to sell out a property without the sanction of the neighbours to an outsider was very limited. The message of the official order was very clear. The Company was reluctant to allow the Indians to enter into the whitemen's zone.

There were legal sanctions as well. Everybody claimed this right as it was the "custom" of this country. But since which date custom had started prevailing—it is not possible to determine. In a litigation, a complainant claimed to have been enjoying the same since the period when the Maratha Ditch had been dug.<sup>88</sup> Whatever might have been the date, the Supreme Court was firm in its resolve "not to injure the Faith, and Sentiment" of the Indians by altering the same custom.<sup>89</sup> Hence 'faith' and 'sentiment' were fully honoured by the colonial rulers in giving a racial character to their settlement.

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87. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 5.8.1774.

88. *Supreme Court (Plea Side)* 1781; Manik Lol Das vs. Sibū Kapali

89. *Supreme Court (Plea Side)* 1788; Harilal Bandopadea vs. Netai Sarma.

### 7. *A break on urbanisation : Property Right*

Such a wide protection of the right of property by the judiciary was always not so conducive towards an urban growth. Development of well-planned urban settlement usually required an accommodating people in whose locality such works were undertaken. But in Calcutta, this did not happen. First, the involvement of the Company in public works was negligible. Secondly, if any action private or public, was thought to have encroached the right to private property, the judiciary extended its authority to save the aggrieved.

How much the injunction of the court was responsible in stalling a public work could be understood from a case of one Martin Massey. Martin had erected some parts of his building illegally on public land. The Commissioners of Police demolished the building. Soon after this, Martin moved before the Supreme Court and, on 24th February 1792, obtained an order of trespass against the Commissioners. In the opinion of the judges, though the land in question was not included in Martin's *patta*, yet it formed no part of public road in its original form. In view of this judgement, it was apprehended in official circles that no action of that nature would be possible in future to prevent illegal encroachments. Hence the Collector proposed to allot that public land to Martin which meant the road in front of his house would never be wider.<sup>90</sup> The case of Martin was not an isolated one. More or less this was the shape of things which used to happen. The executive decisions to renovate and rebuild the town were defeated by the intervention of judiciary in favour of private interests. Taking advantage of this some resourceful persons took such measures which often hit their neighbours. It was always terrifying for the public servants to face the Supreme Court<sup>91</sup> It was by then an accepted fact that the court could take cognizance of the acts of the

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90. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 21.3.1792.

91. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 4.5.1792.



Collector.<sup>92</sup> Because of such protections given by the court, the rich and unscrupulous men could exercise their resources to extend the limit of their respective properties in the town, or prevent government acquisition on them for public welfare.

The legal provisions even led to some long-drawn legal battles between two parties. To a some extent, Calcutta had to witness a series of such battles which ultimately led to some unhealthy consequence. Colonel Watson had to fight Gokul Ghosal for lands in Kidderpur to build his dock. Colonel Watson was granted land by the government which affected large estates of Gokul Ghosal, the founder of Bhukailash raj. But Gokul was not a person to give in. He claimed easement right and moved before the Supreme Court against Watson. "The land claimed by Gocul Gosaul was of the utmost importance." It was feared by William Hickey, the attorney of Watson that, "In short, if he succeeded in establishing his right to the land it completely did away with the possibility of carrying the proposed plan (*of wet and dry docks*) into execution."<sup>93</sup> Ultimately, Gokul recovered 5 *bigha* 2 *cottah* land which had been included into the dock premises.<sup>94</sup> The decision of the court dampened the zeal of Watson. The dockyard could not be completed as proposed and within a few years Watson sold out his estate to Charles Watt. A good possibility for a modern dock undertaken by a private individual was delayed. Though the dock in Kidderpur could not be prevented from taking its shape, yet it had to pass through its initial trauma. While encountering such problems once the Collector of Calcutta condemned "the Natives" saying that their "Litigiousness of Deposition is

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92. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 1.9.1790.

93. *Memoirs of William Hickey* edt by Alfred Spencer (London, 8th edition) vol. II. p. 149.

Gokul won in the Supreme Court. "Thus a complete stop was put to the further progress of an undertaking that, if completed, would have been of the utmost national importance." *Ibid* p. 150.

94. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 16.4.1779.

notorious.”<sup>95</sup> He only singled out the natives. But the Europeans did not lag behind in moving the court for protecting their individual properties and to exploit properties for any cause.

8. *Compensations whenever acquired.*

As the Company had made possession of a premises a pre-requisite for the ownership, it also initiated a policy to honour the same. Whenever a landholder was dispossessed because of certain acts of the government he was to be compensated. The demand for land instead of cash compensation in such circumstances was the regular feature then. But adherence to this policy failed to yield mobility in the town. Once a landholder invested his money in real estates, and once he regularly remitted his dues to the government, it could be expected that he would not leave his possession unless a property of his convenience was offered in return. But the development of the town then required a mass-scale demolition of existing structures and reorganisation of certain localities. Those would necessitate the acquisition of lands, houses etc. For the principle of the Company, each acquisition was to be compensated. And this led to certain problems. Ultimately the growth of urban morphology suffered.

After the battle of Palasi, the East India Company felt the need of a well-equipped fort. But the existing Fort William did not occupy a position on which works of renovations could be effected. Hence there was the hunt for a suitable place and at the end the acquisition of the entire Gobindapur was made.<sup>96</sup> The dispossessed persons were to be compensated in equivalent terms—land for land and so on. The Company had already initiated a policy to compensate the natives and Europeans alike who suffered during the sack of Calcutta, in 1756. Rev. Long has supplied a list of such payments to the ‘natives’ in the town.<sup>97</sup>

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95. *C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 24.3.1785.

96. *Selections*, No. 239.

97. *Selections* Nos. 359, 360.

That principle was strictly adhered to. Gokul Ghosal's legal action brought his desired results in retaining some of his acquired lands in Kidderpur. The story did not end there. He also instituted other suits for gaining compensations. His prayer was granted by the Governor General-in-Council<sup>98</sup> and he was followed by his neighbours.

Every person in Kidderpur demanded land as compensation for acquisition of their property. Now the Company decided to rehabilitate them in Jora Bag in Sutanuti. Jora Bag or Bagan situated on the bank of the river Hughli and it was near Bara Bazar. It had long been the possession of the Setts, the early settlers in this town. The Setts had also taken initiative in developing the said place. It was officially recognised that the price of land in Jora Bag had very considerably increased.<sup>99</sup> A total number of 56 landholders were to be uprooted from Kidderpur. Altogether they had held 103 *bighas* and 8 *cottahs* land in that place. The valuation of the total was computed at Rs. 75,220-0-0. But in Jora Bag all of them could not be rehabilitated. As much as 48 *bighas* 18 *cottahs* and 9 *chittacks* land could be acquired in that area.<sup>100</sup> As everybody could not be rehabilitated the Company decided to sanction cash amount instead of land to some.<sup>101</sup> But the hunger for land was such that none of these persons accepted the offer. The matter was so grave that Colonel Watson even advised Hastings "to discourage such sort of

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98. *Supreme Court (Plea Side)* 1779.

John Doe vs. Lt. Col. Watson.

Here in the proceedings, a letter dated 4th November 1778. from J. Auriol, the Secretary of the G. G. in Council to Kissen Chunder and Gocul Gosaul was filed as an exhibit; in that letter, the decision of the G. G. in Council for the payment of compensation was communicated.

99. *Rev. Depts. G. G. in C. Progs.* 5.8.1777.

100. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* Appendix to February, 1779.

101. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 5.3.1779. Watson had to face a large number of litigations. Once he even prayed for the Company's help in defending himself in the Supreme Court. *Home (Public) Progs.* 11.7.1786.

applications in order to maintain the Legal authority of Government to remove a Riot from his Possessions whenever a Sufficient object for such an exertion of Power may require it."<sup>102</sup> Really it was a problem unwarranted by Watson as he had the permission from the Directors of the Company.

When the Company was involved in a legal problem over the grants to Col. Watson, its actions invited trouble from a different direction. The Setts suffered because of the Company's policy of rehabilitating the Kidderpur people in some of their properties. The Setts led by Radha Mohan Sett claimed to have received "considerable Rents from the Occupiers" of such lands which had been acquired by the Company. For this they had lost their tenants there.<sup>103</sup> They also claimed to have developed the entire area for habitation.<sup>104</sup>

In view of their claims they were allowed to retain some parts of their entire properties which had not been allotted to others. But this could not satisfy them. They demanded the entire plot. As they moved before the Supreme Court, the court in some cases recognised their plea and reinstated them in their lost property.<sup>105</sup> During those days Calcutta witnessed unique legal battles. Both the Kidderpur people and the Setts were complaining of infringement of their respective rights to property. The matter took such a serious dimension that the Company refrained from being a party in these litigations. Its arguments were that since the Kidderpur people had been given settlement in Jora Bag, it had no interest in that place.<sup>106</sup> Probably it was the chance which the Company as the executive authority in Calcutta missed. If the authority of the Company to re-allocate entire land area of the town was confirmed then the renovation

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102. *Home (Public) Progs.* 14.2.1785.

103. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 6.6.1774.

104. *Home (Public) Progs.* 20.2.1772. The petitioners claimed that "large sum of Monies were Disbursed by your Petitioners' Ancestors in Building Habitations on their Ground at Nimtulla & Jora Baug in Sootanootey."

105. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 26.2.1779.

106. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 22.6.1778.

of the town could have been possible. But the Company's decision to honour the property rights in all cases made the matter complicated. The demand for compensations and that too in equal terms, posed an obstacle to many works of public nature. Major Tolley's two separate proposals for a better communication of Calcutta met the same fate. The first was for a public road "directly across the country from Calcutta to Patna and from thence to Benaras." The other was for "cutting a canal from Balliagaut, a village upon the west side of the salt water lake, to communicate with a rivulet which branches from the Ganges a little below this town."<sup>107</sup> Only his second proposal was approved of because "less private property fell within this line than the former."<sup>108</sup>

For the non-availability of suitable and adequate land the most affected part of the town was its roads. Any undertaking in turn meant the payment of equal compensations to the owners who would be affected. Hence the roads could not be built. Tanks for potable water could not be dug. When the Collector of Calcutta was empowered to supervise all the roads for six miles beyond the limits of the town, he was specifically asked to indemnify those who would lose their properties.<sup>109</sup> Suitable compensations were offered to those including Raja Huzzurimal in 1762-63, who had lost lands in Dharmatala Bazar for making a public road there.<sup>110</sup>

Besides the problem relating to such compensations, there were other difficulties which also contributed to the sorry state of the town. If a land was not utilised for the purpose for which it was specifically acquired then, the said land ought to be returned to the former owner. Even the lands in Chowringhee were not spared from this custom.<sup>111</sup> Even a single *bigha* of

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107. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 7. Letter to the Court dated 5.8.1775. paras. 23-24.

108. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 7. From same to same dated 15.1.1776. para. 15.

109. *C. O. R. Progs.* 9.5.1781.

110. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 14.2.1779, typed vol. 6.1.1780 & 7.1.1780.

111. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 13.3.1787 and 8.6.1787.

untenanted land in the vicinity of the Esplanade could not be found. The Company's decision to extend the boundaries of the Esplanade was for military considerations. But it faced the problem relating to the payments of compensation. The demand for land at that time was much higher in the town proper than that in its adjoining areas. Even a religious person like one Lalghar Gossain demanded land compensation for his place of worship which was acquired for the extension of the Esplanade.<sup>112</sup> But significantly, the persons in areas near the 24 Parganas did not claim land as compensation for the same action of the Company as in the Esplanade. They were satisfied with cash compensations only.<sup>113</sup>

#### 9. *Conclusion.*

The right of property and its security as provided by the colonial judiciary during its initial days attracted people to settle in Calcutta. When the people realised that the investments in real estates would pay dividend, they felt enticed to be in the town. But it is improper to conclude that each and every settler in Calcutta used to own properties. As rents were charged on every holding save a very limited few, the holders had to remit their dues regularly. In cases of default, the holdings were to be transferred to others who agreed to pay the rent. Hence, the owners used to induct tenants in their lands and tried to develop their estates. In course of time, Calcutta witnessed the growth of a urban propertied class who could command huge estates.

But the number of actual holdings did not increase neither the dwellings and this was the basic constraint towards the urbanisation. The strict adherence to the right of pre-emption was a major hurdle in this regard. None of the wealthy persons did allow their estates to be partitioned and the entry of the outsiders into their locality. Another problem which was also responsible for such things, was the shortage of liquid cash

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112. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 19.6.1787.

113. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 31.8.1787.

during those days. It was then an all-Bengal phenomenon. The battle of Palasi not only sealed the inflow of silver, the principal metal for minting coins, from outside but also, it paved the way for huge drain. To save the situation temporarily Hastings introduced conch-shell as a means of exchange. But that did not improve the situations. For the non-availability of liquid cash, rapid transfer of properties was not possible. This was one of the reasons for the nominal growth in number of dwellings during the entire period under study. The legal protection led to such a growth of Calcutta as a town as to ensure some sprawling estates of affluent men co-existing with a mass of slums. The right of easement allowed a person to claim advantage on the properties of adjacent owners. And a dispute could only be settled in the law court. Again it was the richmen who could exploit the judicial process as they had command in many spheres.

One of the principal features of the settlement during the period under study, was the division of the town on racial line. A. D. King's thesis presents such a formation on racial line in a colonial city. He points out that everywhere in India, the colonial masters used to maintain this division.<sup>114</sup> But this did not happen suddenly. In fact with the coming of the first fort on the bank of the river and in the midst of Calcutta this division became evident. The whitemen preferred to live around the said fort and, that was probably for protection which they had expected to come from the fort. With the clearing of jungles in southern direction along the Chowringhee and with the transfer of the fort at the site of Gobindapur the Europeans also started moving towards that direction. Here too, they utilised the right of pre-emption to keep their localities exclusively for themselves. Though some houses in such areas were owned by the Indians they seldom lived there. In some cases such ownerships had originated from mortgages etc., which the Europeans used to do for getting money from the Indians. Calcutta owned its very colonial character in the said process.

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114. A. D. King, *op. cit.* pp. 17-18.

## FISCAL DYNAMICS OF URBAN GROWTH

Calcutta in the second half of the eighteenth century was placed in a capital-short economy. Capital of the interior *rajas* and richmen did certainly flow into this town but it was eventually lost in extravagant purchase of real estates. There was also a little capital concentrated in the hands of the banians and merchants who having secured a station as liaison-persons in the private trade of European merchants could utilise the protective umbrella of the ruling power. But these men also came to be actuated by the *raja*-motiff and sank into the extravaganza of the Mughal-type territorial aristocracy. The result was that capital was seldom available for the promotion of those three villages into a town or the town into a city. The story of fiscal constraints have been dealt with in part one of the analysis given below while in part two following this, will be available the consequence of fiscal insufficiency which did not permit the growth of urban infrastructure. Whatever elements of town-building were available in this context of capital shortage was either done by private enterprise or if at all done at public level, it was done as half-hearted effort losing its spirit before reaching the point of maturity.

### PART—I

#### Financial Constraints Faced by the Company

Unlike some well-known towns in India which were founded and patronised by the Mughal rulers, Calcutta did never enjoy



any umbrella from its foreign masters. The first and primary object of the English East India Company was its trade. To achieve its commercial ends it required a fortified settlement of some permanent nature. Calcutta's status was that-a fortified base for commercial overgrowth. Ultimately the place became the centre for political and administrative activities.

Since the Company assumed the reins of power its commitments were too pressing. Besides this, commercial investments had caused problems to the Company in the first half of the eighteenth century. The Company had long been suffering from the problems of ready cash and it needed a mint in Calcutta as early as 1709.<sup>1</sup> But that could not be materialised. It had to face a line of very strong and able Nawabs in Bengal who refused to oblige them. Hence the Company had to depend on Madras money. Still that could not make the matter easy for it. The Company's problems were aggravated by the *batta* system. The local merchants usually refused to accept the Madras coins.<sup>2</sup> If they accepted at all they did it only on high *batta*.

The situation was made worse after 1757. The battle of Palasi opened the flood-gates to large number of private European fortune-seekers who attempted to dominate the economy of Bengal outside the sphere of the Company's investments.<sup>3</sup> Being under a strong political umbrella the Company's officials refused to pay any duty for their private trade. That ultimately hit the public exchequer.

Similarly the exactions by the Company's officials from the Indian richmen including the Nawab himself caused a heavy drain of the indigenous resource. No exact estimate is possible about the money which had been exacted by the Company's servants from the Indians. But from a Select Committee report

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1. S. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.* p. 103.

2. *Ibid.* p. 110.

3. N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History etc.*, vol. I. p. 10.

before the House of Commons in 1773, we can gather an idea about the volume. Between 1757 and 1766, the Company's servants received no less than £ 5,940,498 from the rich Indians.<sup>4</sup> All this money was drained out.

The battle of Palasi totally stopped the bullion-import by the Company. But its eagerness in opening its own mint at Calcutta did not dissipate. Owning a mint was not only an immense necessity to the Company but also, a matter of prestige. It had been a bone of contention for long between the Nawabs of Bengal and the Company. The battle of Palasi removed the obstacle. But the Company was disheartened from the very beginning.<sup>5</sup> The merchants as well as the people in general, refused to accept the coins minted at Calcutta. Immediately after the battle of Palasi, a five and a half to ten percent of deduction was charged on the coins minted at Calcutta.<sup>6</sup> To save the Company from this problem Mir Qasim by an order dated, 18th December 1760, made it a punishable offense for those who would charge *batta* on the coins minted at the Company's mint.<sup>7</sup>

But that was not the end of all troubles. The Company's liabilities rose without any proportion as soon as it had acquired political power. It had to face a serious trouble in 1760. In that year, the Marathas entered the province from the south and by their ravages put a stop to the collection of the revenues upon which the Company depended to meet the expenses of the year. In March the Chief and Council at Dhaka were asking Holwell for an immediate supply of money or permission to borrow from the house of Jagat Seth.<sup>8</sup>

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4. K. M. Mohsin, *op. cit.* pp. 212-13.

5. F. W. I. H. vol. 2. Letter to the Court, dated 29.12.1750, para—60.

6. J. H. Little, *The House of Jagatseth* (with an introduction of N. K. Sinha, Calcutta, 1967) p. 153.

7. C. P .C. vol. I. No. 709.

8. J. H. Little *op. cit.* p. 210.

The Company had even withheld payment of compensations to the private Europeans in Calcutta, although a fund had been received from the Nawab as restitution money. In their letter dated, 3rd February 1760, to the Directors the Council at the Fort William observed that, "We agreed to advance them 12 1/2 Pr. Cent in part of the Interest due on their establish'd Claims but have order'd that no demand, exceeding. Two thousand Rupees shall be paid in ready money."<sup>9</sup>

After the acquisition of *Diwani* in 1765, the Company aimed at improving its financial position. Clive even wrote to the Directors that it could get a clear surplus of 122 lakhs of *sicca* rupees or £ 1,650,900. At this juncture a serious debate relating to the Company's future in India was started in England. In 1766, the Earl of Chatham was of the opinion that the Parliament should have a control on every new territorial conquest. Though the matter could not be solved for ever at that time,<sup>10</sup> it opened a new process of administrative control. In 1769, an act was passed for which the Company was to pay into the public exchequer of England £ 400,000 annually in consideration of its prospective enjoyment of the Indian revenues for the next five years.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, it had to remit huge amounts to other presidencies in India.<sup>12</sup> "The bond debt of the Company on Bengal in 1769 was only £ 351,817. In 1773 it amounted to no less than £ 1,547,448"<sup>13</sup> and the Company was to borrow from the home government £ 1,500,000 at an interest of 4 per cent. By this it invited the state control over its affairs and this ultimately resulted in the promulgation of the Act of Lord North.<sup>14</sup> It was settled by the said Act

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9. F. W. I. H. vol. 3. Letter to the Court, dated 3.2.1760, para—5.

10. P. J. Marshall, *Problems of Empire* etc., (London, 1968) p. 30.

11. I. B. Banerjee, *op. cit.* pp. 1-5.

12. P. J. Marshall, *Problems of Empire* etc. Document No. 33.

13. N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History* etc. vol. I. p. 15.

14. I. B. Banerjee, *op. cit.* pp. 15-6.

that the Company should pay in India two lakhs of rupees annually to the King of England for every regiment of 1000 soldiers employed in India. Not only this, the Company was also to supply all necessary stores for the repair of the King's ships in India. But after the peace, such stores were to be supplied at the Company's expense.<sup>15</sup>

To meet the deficit in 1781, the Governor General and Council "resolved accordingly to accept loans for the public service from individuals." And in order to "establish the most perfect and the most satisfactory security for the payment of several annuitants, the Governor General and Council further resolved to assign over the nett revenues of all the Company's land...within the limits of town of Calcutta and the dihis contiguous thereto."<sup>16</sup> Net revenues of the land so to be assigned being 11 lakhs rupees or something like that. In face of such serious financial constraints, the Company had very little to spend for the improvement of Calcutta. Again to liquidate all its debt, the Council at Calcutta in February 1786, drew *hundis* for six crores of rupees on the Directors of the Company.<sup>17</sup> During the same period, Warren Hastings plundered Benaras and ordered a virtual loot on the Begams of Oudh. Still the Company could not improve its coffer. It had to collect money from Monohar Das, the principal banker in Benaras for its campaigns of Surat and Madras in 1787.<sup>18</sup>

When the Company in Bengal was lacking in finance it had to send treasures to Madras to combat Mysore. Initially the Company's official shipments of specie from Bengal to Madras were wholly in gold. "Fifty ingots of gold, valued at two lakhs in terms of sicca rupees, left Calcutta for Madras...in December

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15. W. Milburn. *The Oriental Commerce*, (London, 1812) vol. I. p. lxi.

16. *C. P. C.* vol. VI, No. 179.

17. *C. P. C.* vol. VII, No. 437.

18. *C. P. C.* vol. VII, No. 4468.

1789, and 50,000 gold mohurs, the equivalent of 8 lakhs of rupees, followed them in March 1790. When the war was really under way, chests of sicca rupees predominated in these shipments to Madras." But the financial strength of the Company gradually became weak. It failed to remit the treasure required for the said purpose. With the opening of the second year of war, the government's difficulties in getting specie in Bengal were evidenced by the appearance of Venetians, Spanish dollars, Delhi mohurs, and bar silver in invoices to Madras.<sup>19</sup>

When the burden on the Company made its position uncomfortable its volume of trade in new direction was increasing daily. During the same period the Company's China trade was to be financed by the resources collected from India. The IXth Report from the Select Committee in 1783, mentioned that "About one hundred thousand pounds a year is also remitted from Bengal, on the Company's account to China and the whole of the product of that money flows into the direct trade from China to Europe."<sup>20</sup> P. J. Marshall believes that nearly 85 per cent of the Company's huge investments in China was contributed from the surplus collected from Bengal.<sup>21</sup>

The conquest of Bengal "set off a scramble among the Company's servants for spectacular presents and opportunities to loot the Bengal revenue system on a large scale."<sup>22</sup> With the Company their private trade also made a steady progress. No doubt, often they received money from their banians, chiefly based on Calcutta. But their unscrupulous means to procure resources certainly ruined this country.<sup>23</sup> The money was also

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19. Holden Furber, *The John Company at Work*. (Harvard, 1951) pp. 249-50.

20. K. M. Mohsin, *op. cit.* pp. 213-14.

21. P. J. Marshall, *Problems of Empire* etc. p. 90.

22. P. J. Marshall, *The East Indian Fortunes* etc. . . p. 158.

23. A. T. Embree's detailed study of this situation in *Charles Grant and British Rule in India*. (London, 1962).

drained out of Bengal as a large number of Company-servants were too greedy to buy diamonds from various parts of India.<sup>24</sup>

Exactions of various nature as well as loss of bullion-inflow resulted in a severe shortage of liquid cash. An urban settlement always required an availability of liquid money to undertake mass-scale public works and, smooth transactions in real estates. Then silver was widely used as a currency. That was to be brought in Bengal from outside. The battle of Palasi put a stop to this inflow. But the pressure on Bengal increased. Such drains were not new. Previously the money was also drained out of Bengal but, the amount was fixed. The Nawabs of Bengal usually sent 125 lakhs of rupees per annum to the Emperor at Delhi.<sup>25</sup> Still they had enough resource to dispense with for town-building. But now there was no such fixed amount. And this fact alarmed the Council at the Fort William even in 1768. In their letter to the Directors dated, 24th March 1768, they pleaded helplessness for the scarcity of silver as "The great demands which have been made on this Presidency for Supplies of Money from every quarter, have reduced your Treasury to a very low State."<sup>26</sup>

In the five years after the acquisition of *Diwani*, "the sums exported in silver by the English Company alone" amounted to £ 1,284,008.<sup>27</sup> Verelst calculated that by 1766, Bengal had lost no less than eight million sterling due to the exportation of silver<sup>28</sup> To solve the acute crisis the Company introduced gold coins in Calcutta. But that could not ease the crisis at all.<sup>29</sup>

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24. N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History*, etc., vol. I. p. 133.

25. J. N. Sarkar. *The History of Bengal*, vol. II. pp. 424-5, 433.

26. *F. W. I. II*, vol. 5. Letter to the Court dated 24.3.1768. para—10.

27. Henry Verelst *A View of the Rise, Progress and the Present State* etc. (London, 1772) p. 85. "Indeed, the practice of sending silver from Bengal to China commenced as early as the year 1757, and continued without remission to the year 1770".

28. *Ibid.* p. 86.

29. K. K. Datta, *op. cit.* p. 140.

No doubt, the people in general had to suffer but, the Company was the maximum sufferer for its own policy. "It is asserted that the Provinces are drained of their Current Coin which enters in the Publick Treasuries, and is not carried back again into circulation for want of equal trade."<sup>30</sup> Hence a bank was proposed at Calcutta. The Company's one of the chief policies behind this move was to increase the inflow of liquid cash into Calcutta. The Revenue Board, in its proceedings of 28th May 1772, asked the revenue-farmers to deposit their respective rents immediately at Calcutta in "ready money" instead of the *Suddar Katcherries*.<sup>31</sup>

The shortage in coins was always felt at Calcutta by its rulers. On 10th October 1789, the Collector of Calcutta reported that usually revenue in the town was collected in gold and copper. Interestingly, there was no reference to any silver coin. To collect those coins the *itmamdars* (or collection peons) were to "accommodate (*sic*) the Ryots by joining three or four together, who make up a small gold coin among them."<sup>32</sup> By the process, it was expected that the inhabitants of the town would bring out the hidden treasure. But the treasure was never there, at least during those days.

## PART—II

### Urban Infrastructure

The Company's difficulties during those days are now well-known. In its trade, finance was a constant need and in case of the Company's administration in Calcutta, its shortage was

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30. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 20.1.1775.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 15.10.1789.

a constant constraint. All along the Company strove hard in accumulating resources as we have seen. It demanded compensations from Siraj-ud-Daulah for his attack on Calcutta in June, 1756. Later on when the conspiracy was hatched, Mir Jafar by his treaty signed on 5th June 1757, promised to pay altogether Rs. 2,29,00,000 as a compensation to the Company, to the merchants of different communities as well as to the inhabitants of the town. Between 5th July 1757 and 8th November 1760, he actually paid Rs. 2,25,50,000.<sup>33</sup> But there is no statistics about the actual loss the Company had suffered during the sack of Calcutta. The only available information has been supplied by Jame Long. It is found that in 1757, the total assets of the Company including the Redout at Bagbazar in the north of the town, were valued at Rs. 2,22,024.<sup>34</sup> Judging from this account and the amounts of actual receipts, it may be said that, the Company did not lose financially. With the money the Company planned to erect a grand fort—the bone of contention for long.

### 1. *Fort and defence.*

The Company's strategy to instill confidence in the minds of the inhabitants of the town was an unfailing one. But its cautious attitude originating out of a weak coffer always prevented it from taking any big project. Apprehending the Nawab's invasion in February 1756, Col. Scott had proposed to cut a canal of 36 feet wide and 12 feet deep around Calcutta for which 75,458 rupees and 14 annas were needed. But such an important proposal was also rejected as that involved too much money.<sup>35</sup> The principle of the Company was, to transfer the financial burden of whatever nature on the shoulders of the residents of the town.<sup>36</sup>

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33. A. C. Roy, *The Career of Mir Jafar Khan* (Calcutta, 1953), p. 293.

34. *Selections*. No. 423.

35. C. R. Wilson, *Old Fort William in Bengal*, vol. II, No. 272 and also F. W. I. H. vol. 1. Letter to the Court dated, 21.2.1756. Enclosure No. 6.

36. C. R. Wilson, *Old Fort William in Bengal*, vol. I. No. 223.



In a contrast to the strife prevailing all over India, Calcutta had unique distinction of not being a target of enemies after February, 1757. After the destruction of Chandernagore by Clive and after the battle of Palasi, the Company needed hardly any measure to defend Calcutta. This advantage prevented even the necessary defence constructions in and around Calcutta.

But a fort on a grand scale was a necessity that could not be ignored. Soon after its victory at Palasi, the Company decided to build the fort at the site of the Gobindapur village. In absence of any record it is very difficult to accept the view of A. K. Ray that "With a part of the restitution money Govindapur was clear of its native residents."<sup>37</sup> The Company had to arrange resource for the said purpose which became very hard. The Directors of the Company expressed their unhappiness for the "immense" expenditure.<sup>38</sup> They felt that the extensive plan was "adopted contrary to our original intentions." They also advised to reduce the plan" and "to put a stop to the outworks" for the time.<sup>39</sup> Though the officials of Calcutta maintained that the progress of the construction "towards rendering the Fort Defensible was very considerable,"<sup>40</sup> the Directors "cannot avoid expressing" their "great uneasiness upon observing so great a share of our capital in a great measure unnecessarily sunk."<sup>41</sup>

The original plan of Capt. Brohier for the completion of the fort involved a total sum of £ 600,000<sup>42</sup> and, the Directors were alarmed when they found that by the end of December, 1761, the expense was as much as £ 350,000 and a lot of works

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37. A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* p. 92.

38. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 3. Letter from the Court dated, 1.4.1760. paras. 106 and 138.

39. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 3. Letter from the Court dated 31.12.1760. para—64.

40. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 3. Letter to the Court, dated 12.11.1761. para—82.

41. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 3 Letter from the Court, dated 31.12.1760. para—55.

42. *Ibid.*

still remained to be completed.<sup>43</sup> Hence the expense on this account was restricted severely.<sup>44</sup> Ultimately the Select Committee decided not to spend huge amount on this account as it was by that time, considered only to be a temporary need.<sup>45</sup>

Still the Company had to complete the artillery yard, a stand of armoury to hold 20,000 stands of arms. All those structures had their lower stories to be made bombproof.<sup>46</sup> It had completed some army barracks, namely the Royal Barrack and the South Barrack by early 1764. The Company also raised the bank of the river Hughli adjacent to the fort. A committee was also constituted with the Chief Engineer, the Master Attendant and the Civil Architect to consider all means for applying a remedy for regular erosion of the river bank nearly involving a total cost of six lakhs and six thousand rupees.<sup>47</sup> While approving of this proposal out of a compulsion, the Directors did not fail to express their anguish for the "original Bad Construction of the Works."<sup>48</sup>

The Directors felt disturbed over the length of time which was required to complete the works. The pace of constructions was too slow till April 1777. By then at least 30 lakhs of rupees had already been spent<sup>49</sup> and the authorities at Calcutta had to cut short the original plan for want of funds.<sup>50</sup>

When the Company was reluctant to spend the necessary amounts for the construction of the fort at Calcutta, 22 lakhs of rupees were said to have been spent on the works for the

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43. *F. W. I. II.* vol. 3. Letter from the Court, dated 9.3.1763. para—66.

44. *Select Committee Progs.* 19.12.1766.

45. *Selections.* No. 877.

46. *Home (Public) Progs.* 4.6.1764.

47. *F. W. I. II.* vol. 4. Letter to the Court, dated 24.3.1766. para—60.

48. *F. W. I. II.* vol. 5. Letter from the Court, dated 4.3.1767, para—30.

49. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 4.4.1777.

50. *General Letter from the Court of Directors (Revenue)* MSS dated. 25.6.1782, para—156.

Fort St. George in Madras between 1752 and 1761 and, again 52 lakhs between 1772 and 1773.<sup>51</sup> Undoubtedly, the vulnerability of the English in Madras in the face of hostility from Mysore, then aided by the French, had forced it to undertake those construction works on the war-footing. But the fortune of Calcutta in not being vulnerable to the enemies had robbed it of its defence importance in the eyes of the Company. Hence the Chief Engineer of the Company had to appeal for sanction of an amount of *sicca* rupees 5000 even on 17th March 1784.<sup>52</sup> A draw bridge before the Water Gate of the fort could not be completed till 1785.<sup>53</sup> Though the works were initiated soon after the battle of Palasi, a lot of works remained to be completed even in the year of 1789.<sup>54</sup>

Besides the fort the Maratha Ditch was also necessary for the purpose of defence. Through this very Ditch the people's involvement in public works was first demonstrated. The Maratha Ditch had been dug by the Indians under the supervision of the Company in 1743-44 as a first line of defence in the town. But the Maratha scare speedily died down and the Ditch remained incomplete: "no care had been taken to keep clear the portion that had been finished, so that it was partially choked with mud, and was fordable at almost any point in its course."<sup>55</sup>

Certainly the victory at Palasi, had made superfluous the zeal of the Company to raise a permanent line of defence against any sort of invasion. Once it was proposed to use the Salt Water lake on the east of the town for such purpose.<sup>56</sup>

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51. C. R. Srinivasachari, *op. cit.* p. 177.

52. *Home (Public) Progs.* 22.3.1784.

53. *Home (Public) Progs.* 9.5.1785.

54. *C. P. C.* vol. VIII. Nos. 976 and 1074.

55. S. C. Hill, *Bengal in 1756-57*. (London, 1905) vol. I. pp. xxxiv-v.

56. *Selections*. No. 244.

But that too was not materialised. Ultimately, the Maratha Ditch was considered as the boundary of the town on the north and north-eastern direction till that was converted into Circular Road.

## 2. *Cleaning of the Esplanade.*

While preparing schemes for a fort prior to the battle of Palasi, the Company had taken some interest in cleaning the near-by jungles.<sup>57</sup> That was also done to bring a larger quantity of land for habitation. That was nothing to do for the improvement of public health. The Directors were explicit in their directions for raising money from the residents as those were "of general and Public Utility."<sup>58</sup> During the entire period of its rule, the Company did not deviate from this principle.

But the clearing of the Esplanade was ultimately a prime necessity to the Company for strategic reasons. The access to the fort must be cleared from any sort of obstructions. The clearance of the Esplanade was said to have been completed before the year of 1760.<sup>59</sup> But in doing so, the Company had to bear a tremendous burden. Its right of property was secured no person could be displaced from his property unless properly compensated. The demand for land was usual then. So a large number of such men were rehabilitated in Bahir Simla in the nearby 15 *Dihis*.<sup>60</sup> Altogether 655 persons were removed from Gobindapur, *Dihi* Calcutta and Dhalanda.<sup>61</sup> There were some monetary involvements also. An abstract from the General Books of Sums shows that between 1757 and 1763, a total amount of

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57. *Selections*. No. 75.

58. C. R. Wilson, *Old Fort William in Bengal* vol. I. No. 237.

59. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 1.9.1775.

60. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 14.8.1775.

61. *Home (Public) Progs.* 26.8.1768.

Rs. 58,437-15-10 had to be paid to different persons in a way of compensation.<sup>62</sup>

So the Company must be calculative in every respect. For that it took a long time in cleaning the Esplanade though this place had military importance. As late as 1787, reports were made available to the Governor General and his Council about the problems of removing the huts of the servants of the hospital and the burial ground.<sup>63</sup> Not only was the fort standing in the immediate vicinity, the European part of the town had also its southern opening on the Esplanade.<sup>64</sup> So it was to be properly looked after. It was extended by at least 177 *bighas* and 16 *cottahs* of land from its original plan.<sup>65</sup>

The Esplanade was the only place within the town which was cleared from all sorts of encroachments. It was also looked upon by the English as an important place. On the western side of it was the fort and, all the other sides were occupied by the Europeans. The cluster of houses and gardens which then surrounded the Esplanade were chiefly owned by them. Hence, the Esplanade was to be perfectly maintained.<sup>66</sup>

### 3. *Port and Dock.*

Another basic requirement for the Company in Calcutta was then a larger port along with a dock. If Calcutta was so commercially important then the Company should have invested a part of its wealth in developing Calcutta into a port-town. Though we have heard a lot of Calcutta's

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62. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 13.8.1779.

63. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs* 27.4.1787.

64. W. K. Firminger, "Materials for the History of Calcutta Streets and Houses, 1780-1834." in *B. P. P.* vol. XIV.

65. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 31.8.1787.

66. W. S. Seton-Kerr ed. *Selections from Calcutta Gazette* etc. (Calcutta, 1865) vol. II. pp. 13-15.

flourishing trade even prior to the period under study,<sup>67</sup> Calcutta did not have a full-fledged port of its own. So to make the place fully developed from commercial standpoint, the prime necessity was to build the port.

It is often said that Calcutta was not designed for a sea port as its anchorage was too bad.<sup>68</sup> Before the battle of Palasi there had not been any provision for ship repairs in Calcutta. Usually the damaged ships were sent to Bombay for this purpose. In 1758, Clive proposed for the building of a dock in Calcutta where the ships could be re-fitted. The expense for the said construction could be balanced from the money that would be saved from not sending the damaged ships to Bombay.<sup>69</sup> But the Company was not ready to spend from its own coffer though it was sure of the benefits. In 1764, it allowed Colonel Watson to construct a dock by dismantling Boykuntpur village, presently known as Kidderpur dock.<sup>70</sup> But the course of construction was too slow.

Though the marine establishment of the Company at Calcutta had been gaining importance since 1758, it took long years to build a dry dock. Nilmoni Mukherjee's study on the port of Calcutta reveals the entire picture.<sup>71</sup> Ultimately the Company built the dry dock at the Bankshall near the old fort. Since 1767, "a plan had been considered for building one between the Marine House and the Old Fort, and utilizing the whole space between these two for the erection of store houses and other buildings."<sup>72</sup> Though the Directors of the Company admitted "the Propriety of removing the Present Banksaul for

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67. *The Cambridge Economic History of India*. vol. I. p. 407.

68. C. Northcote Parkinson, *op. cit.* pp. 36-7.

69. *Selections*. No. 330.

70. *C. O. R. Progs.* 24.6.1782.

71. N. Mukherjee, *The Port of Calcutta : A Short History* (Calcutta, 1968).

72. K. Blechynden, *Calcutta : Past and Present*, ed. by N. R. Ray. (Calcutta, 1978) p. 157.

the Careening of Ships" yet they "cannot but testify "their "Surprize at the Estimate of the Expence amounting to Rupees 324000 which appears to" them "a Sum vastly beyond the Object."<sup>73</sup> So there was no money which could be utilised for the said purpose. But the Directors' advice was to raise fund from the private traders as the proposed plan would be beneficial to them also.<sup>74</sup> Though some enterprising captains took interest in this field, everything did not go smoothly. "So far back as 1769 one Benjamin Lacam perceived the need of securing a place where large ships could be careened and repaired without having to go to Bombay."<sup>75</sup> Even that project generated certain controversy.

But arrangements for ship-building was an extreme necessity then. At the initial stage, the Company's intention was to save its money as the damaged ships were to be sent to Bombay for necessary repairs. The dependence on ships during those days was obvious. Moreover, the rise of Mysore made the position of the English in south India precarious. Calcutta was to supply Madras foodstuff at regular intervals.<sup>76</sup> There was another and very important factor which helped the shipping interest in Calcutta. Due to non-availability of oak in England, the East India Company was not allowed to build ships in its home country since 18th March 1772.<sup>77</sup> Though the shipping lobby in England was opposed to the Asian-built vessels, the availability of raw materials and the lower cost of construction helped

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73. F. W. I. H. vol. 5. Letter from the Court, dated. 16.3.1768. para, 54.

74. *Ibid.* The Letter from same to same, para, 55.

75. N. Mukherjee, *op. cit.* p. 69.

76. James Long in "Calcutta Review" quoted in *Echoes from Old Calcutta* ed. by S. Dasgupta. (Calcutta, 1981) p. 8.

77. W. Milburn, *op. cit.* vol. II. pp. 174-5.

Calcutta to grow as a major ship-building centre.<sup>78</sup> Calcutta was chiefly dependent on Burma for the wood which was used to build ships. The traditional Indian ship-building centres were located on the western coast where the Malabar teak was used. Though teak from Burma and more specifically from Pegu, was inferior in quality to the Malabar timber, that was cheap and could be easily transported to Calcutta.<sup>79</sup> Very soon the demand for Pegu teak increased in Calcutta.<sup>80</sup>

The sea-borne trade which was fast acquiring momentum, gradually made Calcutta an important port.<sup>81</sup> Between 1781 and 1821, as many as 235 ships were built in Calcutta, a majority of which could be easily compared with those built in Europe.<sup>82</sup> In such an atmosphere the Company's policy was to reap maximum advantage by investing a minimum. The Company was aware of the fact that the increasing private trade centering round Calcutta would initiate the required ventures in building a dock from the same quarters. So the Company at least provided the minimum infrastructure for that end. The practice to provide the Pilot Service on the river Hughli is the sole proof of its intentions. "The Directors were willing to put this service on a better footing for the benefit of the private trade as well as their own."<sup>83</sup>

#### 4. Roads and Drains.

Calcutta was chiefly garrison town and a port town combined in one. Communications with other places should be well

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78. K. N. Chaudhuri, *op. cit.* p. 202.

79. C. Northcote Parkinson, *op. cit.* p. 324.

80. B. R. Pearn, *A History of Rangoon* (Rangoon, 1930.) p. 67.

81. Satish Chandra, *The 18th Century in India...*: S. G. Deuskar Lectures on Indian History, 1982. Centre for Studies in Social Sciences. Calcutta monograph (Calcutta. 1986) p. 17.

82. H. R. Ghoshal, *The Economic Transition in Bengal Presidency*. (Patna. 1950) pp. 162-3.

83. N. Mukherjee, *op. cit.* p. 30.



maintained by the rulers of the place. But barring the new fort and to a some extent, the dock at Bankshall, the Company's investments in other civic works are not worth mentioning. During the entire period the Company seldom devoted its attention to civic works, essential for a town. The roads and drains of the town were neglected and the public hygiene in Calcutta was poor.

There are a few records of the Company's involvement in cleaning the drains of the town in the early part of the century. Within some years of its occupation of the town, in 1754, the Company had felt the need to clean the drains of the 'town'.<sup>84</sup> But it is very difficult to understand the term 'town'. However again in 1749, the Council at the Fort William ordered its *zamindar* to survey the drains of the 'town' for necessary repairs. After receiving his report some repairs were conducted "for making the settlement sweet and wholesome."<sup>85</sup>

But those were far from satisfactory. The Company had no perfect planning to provide minimum civic amenities to the inhabitants. It only decided to charge the inhabitants for the services which were provided to them. In doing so it often faced difficulty in assessing "the inhabitants for a proportion of the Expences of repairing Roads, making drains & c." To solve the problem it "determined therefore to double" the ground rent in the town.<sup>86</sup>

The question is, whether the amount received for that specific purpose were spent accordingly or not. Initially the Company had created a post of the Superintendent of the Road. But upon the orders of the Directors the funds allotted to that office was withdrawn in 1766, though, "the great utility of this office

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84. Hari Hai Seth, *Prachin Kalikata Parichaya* . . . . (in Bengalee) (Calcutta, 1952) pp. 13-5; 35-6.

85. *Selections* No. 52.

86. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 3. Letter to the Court dated, 28.10.1762, para, 57.

contributing as well to the convenience of travellers as to the health of the inhabitants" could not be ignored.<sup>87</sup> In a later date however, the funds were again allotted for the improvement of roads. But again in 1773, the Company reduced the said allotments. In that year the *chowkedarry* tax was first introduced in Calcutta and one of the reasons behind such imposition was to raise the fund to meet such expenses as road repairs etc. It was then found that the Company's surveyor had been spending 1100 rupees per month on that account. This was thought too much and the allotment was drastically reduced to 600 rupees only. Moreover, the works were now entrusted to the Superintendent of Police.<sup>88</sup> But the Superintendent had serious difficulties in executing works for the want of money.<sup>89</sup> The Company could not realise the need of a number of roads required then in the town and also the need of better roads. Though Calcutta never had sufficient number of roads, often vital way side lands were sold out to private persons and for this the roads became very narrow.<sup>90</sup> Because of such policy of the government the town had become full of narrow and dingy lanes.

The Company's administration in Calcutta, however, built certain roads of strategic importance and, from this its colonial approach towards the municipal administration was clear. Similarly it maintained the drains in perfect order only in such parts of the town which were either strategically important to it or which were inhabited by the Europeans. For instance, the Company built the road along the riverbank up to the new Powder Works in the north of the town in or about 1777.<sup>91</sup> Certainly this was done to link the fort with the said works. Similarly Kidderpore Road was repaired with the fund provided by the Committee

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87. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 4. Letter to the Court dated 28.11.1766. para,61.

88. *R. B. W. C. Progs.* 8.6.1773.

89. *R. B. W. C. Progs.* typed vol. 12.4.1774.

90. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 21.2.1778.

91. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 10.5.1780.

of Revenue.<sup>92</sup> Kidderpur had been acquiring gradual importance due to the construction of the dock there. Hence it was as important a place as to be properly communicated. In 1782, the road from Surman's bridge on the Tolley's Canal near the Belvedere to Col. Watson's wall in Kidderpur was cleared from the hawkers. It was maintained as a good carriage-way.<sup>93</sup> Not only this, the bridge on the said canal and near the Belvedere was always maintained properly. For the agreement with the Company, Mrs. Tolley, the widow of the deceased colonel was responsible for the bridge. Though she erected a new one the structure was dangerous.<sup>94</sup> The Chief Engineer of the Company had his own project<sup>95</sup> for erecting a perfect bridge on the canal. It is not possible to trace out whether the said project was approved of by the Company or Mrs. Tolley was alone entrusted to do the job in accordance with her own plan. But the bridge was to be repaired regularly.<sup>96</sup>

Such eagerness could not be found everywhere. Belvedere certainly commanded importance as it was owned by no less a person than Warren Hastings himself. Hence the communication between it and the fort had to be made proper. But the Company's colonial attitude was reflected when it undertook the repairing works of the road from *Ghats* Pagladanga and Balia in the 15 *Dihis* to the town. It imposed a road duty on goods and carriages passing through the said road to raise the cost which had been incurred in repairing the same.<sup>97</sup> Then Calcutta used to import a large quantity of goods including daily necessities through those two *Ghats*. Hence the imposition of duties led to the increase in prices of commodities in Calcutta.

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92. C. O. R. Progs. typed vol. 15.8.1781 and 30.5.1782.

93. C. O. R. Progs. 29.8.1782 and 11.11.1782.

94. Home (Public) Progs. 10.8.1792.

95. Home (Public Progs.) 1.2.1788.

96. Home (Public) Progs. 7.4.1790.

97. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 6.5.1788.

The government's eagerness in maintaining and developing those roads which passed through the European localities of the town was explicit. So it developed the "high road" at Dharmatala.<sup>98</sup> But how much amount was invested by the government from its own coffer, cannot be determined. The government accumulated some resource when the excess land on either side of that road (after its widening) was sold out to individuals.<sup>99</sup> A new road was built along the Esplanade from the Hospital to the New Jail and the channels on either side of it were perfectly maintained so that rain waters did not get accumulated in any place on the Esplanade.<sup>100</sup> The officials of the Company kept a constant watch on those roads and drains along the Esplanade.<sup>101</sup>

Vis-a-vis this the localities inhabited by the Indians used to receive a scant regard from the authority. During the entire period there is just only one record of extensive road-repair in the northern part of the town. Incidentally that part belonged to the Indians. In his report dated 20th November 1789 to the Commissioners of Police, Edward Tiretta, the Surveyor of the Roads informed that a road from the Burying Ground in the vicinity of the Esplanade to the Chitpur Bridge in the north, another from Chandpal *Ghat* to Dharmatala, another most probably from Mirjapur to Bytoconnah and, another from Bara Bazar to Chitpur were thoroughly repaired. The drains along those roads were also made "pucca".<sup>102</sup> But there is a difficulty in ascertaining the actual measurements of those roads which

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98. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 23.6.1779.

99. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 24.7.1778.

100. *Home (Public) Progs.* 26.4.1786.

101. *Home (Public) Progs.* 2.9.1789. In their letter dated 26th August 1789 to the Governor General in Council, the Police Commissioners complained that though the roads on the Esplanade had been under the supervision of the Chief Engineer, these had suffered a lot of damages. The long drains required repairs.

102. *Home (Public) Progs.* 10.2.1790.

were said to have been repaired. In another report<sup>103</sup> the total length of the roads repaired was stated as only 7151 yards which was inconspicuous by any standard of achievement. However small this was the only instance of road repairs undertaken by the government in the northern part of the town.

The "native" inhabitants of Calcutta were persistent in their petitions against the utter neglect by the government of the roads in their part of the town. They complained that not a single road in the northern part of the town was properly looked after. Neither the drains were kept clean there. The petitioners could "not find any use of Scavengers in Black Town except to fill Ditches and Tanks" though a considerable amount of money was usually taken by the "Contractor of Scavenger". The consciousness of the petitioners was amply reflected when they complained of not receiving any benefit though they were taxed for the specific purpose.<sup>104</sup> Their grievances were not redressed. The Company's government also repaired thoroughly a road in the Mirajapur area in the present central Calcutta with the soil collected from the bank of the Maratha Ditch.<sup>105</sup> This was done for the benefit of the Europeans. The "native" petitioners alleged that as the Europeans had a number of garden-houses in Italy and in Bytoconnah in the vicinity of Mirajapur, the Company had to undertake such repairs.<sup>106</sup>

Only in certain cases the government ordered the removal of encroachment from the public roads. Since the roads were not properly demarkated any prospect of an attack on encroachments could easily invite litigations. And Calcutta had to witness such litigations time and again. Moreover, the roads were full of hawkers and that too was for the policy persued by the government

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103. *Home (Public) Progs.* 15.12.1789. Report of Edward Tiretta, the Surveyor of Roads to the Commissioner of Police.

104. *Home (Public) Progs.* 7.5.1790.

105. *C. O. R. Progs.* 8.7.1784.

106. *Home Public Progs.* 7.5.1790.

itself. However, only once, order was issued to remove all encroachments from the "ancient (*sic*) King's Highway leading from Calcutta Bridge through the Town...to the Bridge near the Hospital on the road to Russypuglee. And also...ancient (*sic*) King's Highway leading from the Town Hall of Calcutta to the Poittah Connah. And also....ancient (*sic*) King's Highway known by the name Durma Tallah. And also...ancient (*sic*) King's Highway known by the name of John Bazar... Kidderpur Bazar on the road leading to Budge Budge."<sup>107</sup> In doing so the government tried to maintain good communication between a garrison and a salt depot at Chitpur in the north and a river-port at Russapugla in the south. Kidderpur was connected with another garrison at Budge Budge in the further south.

Between the years 1773-74 and 1787-88, the Company allotted only Rs. 75,075-0-0<sup>108</sup> for the maintenance of the roads in the town. But with such a paltry sum the Company did not expect to do everything properly. Hence following a true character of a colonial ruler it innovated a policy. The Lottery Committee was thus constituted : "that as early as 1794 there were Lottery Commissioners ; in that year they advertised for a benevolent charitable purposes of lottery of 10,000 tickets at 32 Rupees each, and some of the best streets are owing to their funds."<sup>109</sup> Thus Calcutta entered into a new phase of life.

### 5. *Water supply.*

The water supply was another civic necessity which also failed to attract appropriate attention from the authorities. Calcutta, being situated on the bank of the river Hughli, was a receiver of abundant water and, that too throughout the year. But that was never potable. Hence the water was to be collected from the tanks in the town. The Indians used to follow their age-old custom in digging and dedicating tanks for religious

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107. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C Progs.* 29.11.1776.

108. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 24.12.1788.

109. James Long, *Calcutta and Its Neighbourhood*... pp. 74-5.

purposes or in memory of some deceased ones. Calcutta did not escape this type of rituals even during the period of our study. And the Company chose to leave the service to private benevolence. Digging of tanks meant the loss of land and, in that process loss of rent. The only thing which was usually done by the Company, was to make those lands rent-free where tanks were dug by private persons for public use.

The most important public tank was then the "Great Tank" or the *Lal Dighi*. The age-old *zamindari katcharry* was situated on its side. Moreover, the chief concentration of the European population was around this tank and its nearby places. The Company took care in its proper maintenance. Under its initiative the tank was deepened in 1783-84. For this work the Company had to incur *sicca* Rupees 4000.<sup>110</sup> The government's eagerness in keeping the water of this tank wholesome was reflected when on 5th May 1785, the Governor General and Council resolved that "the Cleansing and deepening of this Tank should no longer be delayed," for "the Great Tank in the Center of the Town which has hitherto supplied the Inhabitants with water."<sup>111</sup> Probably for such constant watch the drains around this tank were somehow properly maintained.<sup>112</sup> The tank was again deepened in 1794.<sup>113</sup> But this was an exception.

Though the "Great Tank" was the source of potable water, chiefly to the Europeans, they were never happy with it. Records as such are not available from which it can be concluded that the government paid attention to providing this basic civic amenity to the inhabitants of the town. But undoubtedly, there were a good number of tanks in the town during those days. Again available records do not give any idea as to what was done to keep these tanks in proper order. The government did nothing

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110. *Home (Public) Progs.* 3.11.1784 and 14.2.1785.

111. *Home (Public) Progs.* 5.5.1785

112. *Home (Public) Progs.* 15.4.1793.

113. K. Blechynden. *op. cit.* p. 161.

for cleansing the water and for deepening those tanks from where the people used to collect the drinking water. Though the town was ravaged time and again by epidemics, the government paid a scant regard to providing pure drinking water to the inhabitants.

#### 6. *Other works.*

Barring those relating to minimum civic necessities the government was to undertake certain other important jobs. First, to run its trade and then to run administration the Company's authority required some structures in the town. These structures were necessary to house its offices of various natures and also to provide shelter to its employees. We know from traditions that the Company had inherited the *katcharry* building of the Chowdhuries from whom they had purchased the *zamindari* rights. Before the battle of Palasi it had refrained from raising any structures worth-mentioning. In September 1755, it was decided to hire Mr. Dumbleton's house for 1000 Madras rupees per annum in order to house its writers.<sup>114</sup> Certainly the Company was not sure about its future in Calcutta till then.

But all along the Company refrained from spending on the structures necessarily required to run an administration. The Directors always asked their employees in Calcutta to "be as frugal as possible" in raising any building. The Council at Calcutta should not be "expensive."<sup>115</sup> Again they cautioned against the "lavish" buildings and gardens.<sup>116</sup> Even the Governor himself was not allowed to spend for his house and garden from the account of the Company.<sup>117</sup> Similarly to meet shortage of space in the court house, the government only decided to

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114. C. R. Wilson, *Old Fort William in Bengal*. vol. II. No. 264.

115. *Selections*. No. 295.

116. *Selections*. No. 312.

117. *Selections*. No. 309.



hire one for an annual rent of Rs. 2000 in the month of March 1763.<sup>118</sup>

The government could not even build the *katcharry* houses for the use of its revenue department. The Collector of the town once observed that, "the Collections of the Cazannah can not be carried on without Cutcheries to transmit the Business." He also reported the demolition of some hired-*katcharries* by the police.<sup>119</sup> Appreciating the gravity of the problem the Company issued a permission for building some *katcharries*. This involved a total sum of Rs. 2772.<sup>120</sup> But those were not at all adequate.

Like its office buildings the houses for the employees of the administration were also inadequate. The high rate of house-rents during this period proved the excess of demand over supplies of houses in the town. For the high rent, the Junior Members of the Company were always in trouble.<sup>121</sup> Some houses were hired on monthly rents from Thomas Lyon for the writers. The Council at Calcutta justified its action saying "The actual increase of txpense attending it not very considerable as the buildings are only to be rented by the Company."<sup>122</sup> But they failed to convince the Directors regarding this.

#### 7. *Private initiatives in public works.*

Since the efforts on the part of the government was lacking, private persons bore a considerable burden for undertaking necessary development works in Calcutta. The urge for developing their individual properties by the respective owners set the pace of public works in the town. But what led them to do so? A

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118. C. R. Wilson, *Old Fort William in Bengal*, vol. II. No. 346.

119. C. O. R. Progs. 2.5.1782.

120. C. O. R. Progs. 9.5.1782.

121. R. B. W. C. Progs. 16.3.1774.

122. F W. I. H. vol. 7. Letter to the Court dated 25.11.1776. para. 13.

landowner's primary interest was to raise the valuation of his property. The practice was universally followed by the Indians as well as the Europeans in Calcutta during those days. And here lies the success of the Company's rule.

Hence one finds Maharaja Nabakrishna digging a tank on 15 *bigha* land at Simla where he had large estate.<sup>123</sup> Similarly, Raja Ramlochan dug a tank on 6 *bigha* 7 *cottah* land at Arcooli.<sup>124</sup> where he had some properties. The Europeans were not far behind. Andrew Williams dug a tank on 19 *bigha* 5 *cottah* land in Chowringhee where he used to reside.<sup>125</sup> Williams also undertook some development works in Chowringhee near the new jail and the hospital where he had four houses.<sup>126</sup> But one of the best examples was set by Manohor Das. Just for public benefit he proposed to clean the "Old Tank" near Chowringhee at his "own expenses."<sup>127</sup>

In some cases, public roads were also constructed through private initiatives. Nabakrishna constructed a road connecting Chitpur Road with Circular Road in his *talukdary*.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, Thomas Lyon purchased 19 *cottah* land to lay a public road in front of his line of houses where the writers of the Company were housed.<sup>129</sup> This private initiatives ultimately helped the Company's government. In 1788, it distributed lands between Chandpal *Ghat* and Cossaitollah in the central part of the town, to different persons for making a *pucka* drain there at their own cost.<sup>131</sup> Though for long the maintenance of roads and drains had been one of the duties of the Company's *zamindar*,<sup>130</sup> nothing of worth-mentioning was done.

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123. *Selections* No. 580.

124. *C. O. R. Progs.* 13.12.1781.

125. *C. O. R. Progs.* 16.7.1781.

126. *Rev. Dep'tt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 16.11.1781.

127. *Home (Public) Progs.* 22.3.1793.

128. Henry Cotton. *Calcutta : Old and New* ; ed. by N. R. Ray (Calcutta. 1980) p. 289.

129. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 20.8.1779 and 6.9.1779.

130. A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* p 147.

131. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 4.2.1790, Enclosure No. 23.

In the similar fashion the landholders along the river-bank had to undertake the embankment works. The price of land along the river-bank was usually higher. As the trade and commerce were largely concentrated along the river bank and as the Bara Bazar was not too far from the river, the possession of land along its bank was treated as prized possession. This was one of reasons for private undertaking of embankment. But the principal cause was the regular erosion of banks due to the tides of the river. The Company too faced this difficulty while constructing the new fort. As the "Pottah-holders have no right to a single yard of ground beyond that specified in their Pattahs" none could claim any protection from the government against the erosion of the river-bank.<sup>132</sup> Hence to save their properties the owners were forced to protect the same.

But it is wrong to conclude that the persons undertaking such public works had no interest to fulfil. The most important reason behind this private undertakings were financial benefit which a landowner could get from such protected banks. It had been a usual practice in Calcutta for long, that the river-*ghats* were maintained and repaired by private persons. No doubt, there were the *ghats* owned by the Company but, the number of private *ghats* were not insignificant. The importance of *ghats* were due to commercial activities. Moreover, those were the landing places as the waterways were the principal means of communication. The persons who used to repair the *ghats*, claimed control over them. Even in 1820, it was reported that "in some cases, the proprietors of ground on the banks of the River, are in the habit of levying a trifling wharfage on Boats loading or unloading in (*sic*) front of their property."<sup>133</sup> So it was not a surprise when William Johnson proposed to enlarge the *ghat* between his house and the old fort from the existing 50 feet to 80 feet.<sup>134</sup> Lewis Da Costa also claimed to

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132. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 7.4.1820.

133. *Ibid.*

134. Rev. Deputt. G. G. in C. Progs. 30.12.1777. In his letter to the G. G. in Council dated, 11th March, 1777 Johnson mentioned

have raised wall on the river-side to protect his godown near Chandpal *Ghat* from the tides.<sup>135</sup> Thomas Barber sought *patta* for riverside land near the Old Custom House to develop the bank there so that his house was not endangered by the river.<sup>136</sup> Similarly, Andrew Hunter carried out brick works to protect his house near the Bankshall.<sup>137</sup> But Thomas Lyon had a different objective. Lyon's initiative in widening the road in front of the Writers' Buildings has already been mentioned. He also proposed to enlarge the public road near Chandpal *Ghat* "so that it shall not be in the narrowest Part the full width of fifty Feet and keep the same clear and free of all encumbrances."<sup>138</sup> The proposal for a 50 feet road was unique one as the majority of the roads in the then Calcutta were nothing but narrow strips.

An important feature of such development works was that in majority of cases those were undertaken by the Europeans. One of the reasons might be the involvement of the Company though in a very limited way in the development of those parts of the town which were inhabited by the Europeans. This led them to undertake public works. The preference of the river *ghats* was certainly for their commercial interest. The wealthy Indians in Calcutta seldom used their funds in developing the river *ghats*. The Indians were chiefly guided by their age-old

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the plight of the merchants for want of "a sufficient and proper Gaut for landing their goods" and "that there is not at this time one publick Gaut in Calcutta which can commodiously land the hundredth part of the Great variety of goods continually arriving in that Expeditious and safe manner." Hence he proposed to build a public *ghat* near old fort for which he sought land, "with permission to Erect... a range of Godowns and to rail in the whole, being about 120 yards in length and 108 yards in breadth." He was allowed. *Rev. Depts. G. G. in C. Progs.* 11.3.1777.

135. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 23.8.1779. It was also mentioned that in the same year 3 *cottahs* of land was washed away near Chandpal *Ghat*. *Rev. Depts. G. G. in C. Progs.* 3.9.1779.

136. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 25.6.1793.

137. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 18.2.1794.

138. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 6.8.1779 and 6.9.1779; *Rev. Depts. G. G. in C. Progs.* 3.9.1779.

religious beliefs which had taught them to do some charity works on the banks of the holy river and keep constructions away from it.

#### 8. *Conclusion.*

It is not difficult to understand the reasons why a colonial government devoted nothing to raise an infrastructure for the town. No doubt, it had its own difficulties relating to its finance. Its wide ranging trade engagements and its deep involvement in different wars kept its hands tied. Hence its resources and energies were exploited otherwise. Moreover, the security which Calcutta used to enjoy robbed this place of its extraordinary position in the eyes of the foreign masters.

Though the government took some steps to clear the jungles in and around the town,<sup>139</sup> it failed to undertake a systematic development work. Hence the roads were lacking, water supply was nominal. The presence of the river Hughli helped to ease the problems relating to some essential services like water supply and communication. But the river water was not potable. The Company's undertakings were so rudimentary in nature that those could only meet the requirements of the European-dominated localities partially. Similar was the position of the roads. During the initial days of colonial rule not a single major road was built save and except one in the Esplanade.

Still Calcutta commanded respectability as a growing town. The growing political as well as administrative importance of this place attracted people from far and near in increasing number. The massive fortifications were viewed by these people as their saviour in any impending danger. Here lies the success of the Company's government. Hence the persons who wished to own large amount of properties were encouraged to invest money in some public works also.

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139. C. O. R. Progs. 29.11.1781.

## BAZAR IN CALCUTTA'S MORPHOLOGY

The role of the bazars in Indian context is very important. India had experienced a system of town-growth by way of establishing bazars by the rulers of the country. H. K. Naqvi has studied the importance of such bazars, particularly during the Mughal rule.<sup>1</sup> A central bazar was as important as a central mosque to build a town. "Given this nucleus for a town, it would entice villagers from its vicinity" to come to it and settle there.<sup>2</sup> The Mughal towns were chiefly garrison town or commercial town. Interestingly both of them present a similar character—the presence of a consumer class. And this fact has been studied by C. A. Bayly.<sup>3</sup> Bayly says that the presence of garrisons in the closing decades of the eighteenth century created so many rural bazars in Oudh which used to provide provisions to the armies. Similarly, the "local decline" of the Mughal aristocracy also led to the decline of a number of towns whose markets collapsed for the lack of patronage.<sup>4</sup>

It can be said that the tiny assemblage of some persons for exchanging goods usually leads to the formation of a town as often happened in India during the Mughal rule. If the said place is a seat of administration or a garrison the probability increases. But such formations are not easy because the continuation of the bazar requires certain guarantees on which bazars can survive.

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1. H. K. Naqvi, *op. cit.* for details see chapter I.

2. *Ibid.* pp. 4-5.

3. C. A. Bayly's *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, is a very important study.

4. *Ibid.* pp. 55-65.

### 1. *Bazars in Calcutta.*

Calcutta was not a princely town. Hence the much talked of official patronage is not expected to be available here. Still the bazars had to be grown to fulfil certain basic necessities of life. After 1757, the political as well as administrative importance of Calcutta increasingly attracted a large number of people from different places. The growing habitation needed a constant supply of provisions to sustain itself while vendors used to arrive to sale their goods. From that need the markets which were then officially called 'bazars' were established and in some cases those were further developed. It is very difficult to assess whether the growth of population in some localities during those days caused the establishment of a bazar there or with the establishment of a bazar, a locality gradually took its shape. So here, both the arguments put forward by Bayly and Naqvi are simultaneously applicable.

The Great Bazar of *Dihi* Calcutta had already acquired its fame even in the early years of the century. "During this period there were several *bazars* within the Company's jurisdiction in Calcutta, viz. Bara Bazar, Sobha Bazar, Dhobapara Bazar, Hathkhola Bazar, Bagh Bazar, Charles Bazar, Shyam Bazar, New Bazar, Begum Bazar, Ghastola Bazar, Jhon Nagore, and Gunge or Mondy Bazar (situated in the district of Govindpur)"<sup>5</sup> From the facts presented by Holwell it is evident that the earnings from those bazars were really impressive.<sup>6</sup> If one goes by the list given by Holwell, he may draw a picture of concentration of population in some parts of the town even prior to the

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5. K. K. Datta, *Alivardi Khan and his Times*. (Calcutta, 1963) p. 175.

6. Holwell, *India Tracts* (London, 1774). Holwell has given a detailed record of the earnings from the bazars between the period 1738 and 1752. The income from the Gobindapur *Ganj* in 1738, had been Current Rs. 6501., which was increased up to Cr. Rs. 22,760. in 1752. Similarly, the total receipts from the "Great Bazar" or Bara Bazar including all its farms rose from Cr. Rs. 3477 (in total) in 1738 to Cr. Rs. 7500. in 1752. The list is lengthy. A few have been chosen here to show the trend. The details are in the said book. pp. 210-225.

colonial rule. It is interesting to note that those bazars remained more or less in same places (with the only exception of Gobindapur *Ganj* as the entire village was dismantled in 1758 for the construction of the new fort there) during the second half of the eighteenth century as they happened to be in the first or as they happen to exist today.

Population got a lift with the political changes in the country. But the growth was uneven. The density was much thicker in the Indian part which has been termed by some as "Black Town" which synchronized with the northern portion of the town itself. Hence the number of bazars in the northern portion was higher than that of the southern or the European portion of the town. As the East India Company had no programme for the development of the town, the civic necessities were chiefly looked after by the private individuals, some of whom were Europeans and even employed by the Company. But the majority of the bazar-farmers and owners were Indians.

The farming and establishment of bazars were more than a part of civic arrangements. The vendors assembled in the bazars to sell their goods in lieu of certain statutory payments to the farmers or the owners of the bazars. This system could easily fetch a considerable amount of rent and that too in liquid cash. Too often the bazar-farmers tried to "reap an amazing profit" by controlling the prices of various goods through unfair means.<sup>7</sup> The prospect for lucrative gains allured a good number of rich men in farming as well as owning bazars in the town. It was a custom then, that no private bazar would be allowed to continue on a hired ground. Since the right of property and its best utilisation had already been guaranteed by the Company's government, the owner of a bazar had a wide choice. Hence the "repeated interference of the Supreme Court"<sup>8</sup> helped them in protecting their rights and interests. By using

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7. C. O. R. Progs. 3.10.1782.

8. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 1.5.1778.



the same legal protection the farmer or owner of an established bazar could raise objection against the erection of a new bazar in any nearby place. From these a considerable amount of heat and tension were generated in which wealthy persons of the town came to be closely involved.

## 2. *Locations of Bazars*

From the location of bazars during those days, we have an account of localities. Some of them still exist in the same name as they did more than two centuries ago. Chiefly there were two types of bazars during the period. First, the bazars held on the Company's land and were farmed out to individuals, popularly called the *ejaradar* for a specific time and secondly bazars permitted by the Company to the individuals on their respective lands on the basis of certain considerations which were called the *jumma*.

By the year 1785, there were as many as twenty bazars within the boundaries of Calcutta.<sup>9</sup> But actually the figure was much higher. From the table below, the names and character of the bazars can be ascertained.

### BAZARS OWNED BY

<i>the Company</i>	<i>private persons</i>
1. Bara Bazar	1. Gupe Bazar
2. Bow Bazar	2. Kasi Bazar
3. Lal Bazar	3. Ram Bazar
4. Bytoconnah	4. Bogden Bazar of Edward Tiretta
5. Jan Bazar	5. Chandney Chowk of John Sherbun
6. Causeytollah	6. Simla Bazar
7. Dharmatala	7. Golah Bansey of Rajbullav
8. Collimba	8. Taltala
9. Arcooly	9. Revenue-free Bazar of Darpanarain Tagore
10. Hat Jannagore	
11. Hat Rajenagore	

SOURCE : C. O. R. Progs. 11.4.1785

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9. A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* pp. 116-119.

But this list is not exhaustive. The bazars in Sutanuti including its *Hat*, Sobha Bazar, Charles Bazar etc. were not included in the said list. All these were granted for perpetuity to Maharaja Nabakrishna. There is also no reference to Mechua Bazar. Mechua Bazar was started approximately in 1755 with an annual *jumma* of Rs. 165-0-0 and, in 1774, the said *jumma* was said to be Rs. 2016-0-0. In the very next year the amount was increased again and this time it was Rs. 3040-0-0.<sup>10</sup> During this period some bazars recorded considerable increase. Those were Bara Bazar, Bow Bazar, Bytoconnah, Simla and, Dharmatala besides Mechua.<sup>11</sup> The annual *jumma* of some of the bazars present a picture of steady growth.<sup>12</sup> It is important that inspite of the terrible famine experienced by the whole of Bengal the concentration of population in the town and, particularly in some parts were impressive. The growth of population in the northern part of the town, particularly in Jora Bag (or Bagan), was due to the transfer of those inhabitants who had lost their lands in Gobindapur and Kidderpur to enable the new fort and a dock to come up there. There were also certain demands for lands in Mirjapur

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10. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 8.5.1775, and also the Appendix to the month of May, 1775.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Here we may present some figures of annual *jumma* of some bazars in the 1770s i.e. the worst famine decade in Bengal.

Name	in 1773	in 1776	in 1777
Bara Bazar	Rs. 2174-0-0	Rs. 3600-0-0	Rs. 4700-0-0
Mechua Bazar	Rs. 1850-3-9	Rs. 3040-0-0	Rs. 3950-0-0
Bytoconnah	Rs. 1801-0-0	Rs. 3365-0-0	Rs. 5575-0-0
Bow Bazar	Rs. 1452-0-3	Rs. 2435-0-0	Rs. 3050-0-0
Lal Bazar	Rs. 581-6-0	Rs. 1460-0-0	Rs. 2600-0-0
Dharmatala	Rs. 1327-0-0	Rs. 3010-0-0	Rs. 5175-0-0*
Simla	Rs. 709-8-0	Rs. 955-0-0	Rs. 1030-0-0
John Bazar	Rs. 1141-5-0	Rs. 1470-0-0	Rs. 1625-0-0

\* Probably the actual figure is wrong in this record.

SOURCE: *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* (typed vol). 29.4.1774 and 12.11.1776. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 20.5.1778.

in the north-east of the town. Those who had lost their lands in Kidderpur demanded compensations in the nature of land grants in the town itself. Some of them applied for land in the Mirjapur area.<sup>13</sup> No doubt, then Mirjapur commanded certain importance as a locality. Bytoconnah, Arcooly and Mechua—all these bazars were not far from Mirjapur. Similarly Bara Bazar was in near proximity to Jora Bag. Hence the growing habitation was well supplied for its daily requirements. Also the establishment of a *golah* or grain depot by the merchants at Jora Bag clearly indicates the growth of business activities in that area.<sup>14</sup>

It is quite evident that Mirjapur and Bytoconnah area had gradually become populous. Bytoconnah Bazar was then a principal seat for sale of rice and paddy.<sup>15</sup> Baliaghat in the nearby 15 *Dihis* or Panchawangaon was a major port for receiving goods from the districts of the eastern Bengal. Those goods were mainly disposed of at Bytoconnah Bazar. Probably for this reason Job Charnock chose this very place for his initial business activities.

The Company was also aware of the steady population growth in that locality. This growth obviously required to be catered. But the Company could do nothing for this purpose. The matter was entirely left to be looked after by private initiative. One Radhamohan Tagore had a piece of land measuring 20 *bighas* at Mirjapur for which the annual *jumma* was *sicca* Rs. 250-0-0. He petitioned for erecting a bazar on that plot.<sup>16</sup> The Collector of the town observed that such a bazar should produce at least 3 to 4 thousand rupees annually. Hence, a fixed *jumma* of Rs. 100-0-0 only, which the applicant had offered to pay, was a meagre amount. The applicant's case

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13. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 29.12.1780.

14. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 7.11.1775.

15. *C. O. R. Progs.* 3.9.1781.

16. *C. O. R. Progs.* 8.11.1781.

was that, he had to face the initial hazards for starting a new bazar in the locality. His argument was admitted. He was allowed for a year on an experimental basis by the Governor General in Council.<sup>17</sup> This was not an isolated fact. The Company's ultimate intention was to raise an infrastructure of the town to facilitate its collections. Whenever it failed to open new avenues on its own for such collections it allowed private ventures to fill the gap.

After 1758, the population of Simla in the northern part of the town began to increase as a large number of displaced persons from Gobindapur and Jora Bag were rehabilitated there.<sup>18</sup> The Company took certain interest in developing this particular area.<sup>19</sup> While purchasing this village Holwell also envisaged the same thing. But as usual in the absence of public investment the matter was to be taken up by private persons. So when one Jagannath Roy applied for a bazar in that locality, he was immediately permitted.<sup>20</sup> Still on 26th November, 1784, the inhabitants of the said locality sent a petition to the Governor General in Council for a larger bazar there.<sup>21</sup>

Bara Bazar and the *Ganj* at Sutanuti were two most important bazars all along. The former was regarded as the biggest trading mart in this part of India. Holwell tells at length about the trading activities of Bara Bazar.<sup>22</sup> If A. K. Ray is to be

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17. C. O. R. Progs. 3.12.1781.

18. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 14.8.1775.

19. F. W. I. H. vol. 5. Letter to the Court dated 2.2.1769, para 69.

20. C. O. R. Progs. 18.6.1781.

21. C. O. R. Progs. 6.1.1785.

22. Holwell, *India Tracts* "The Great Bazar, under the district of Dee Calcutta is farmed out in three partitions (but generally held by the same person) under the heads of, first. Tow Bazary (*sic*), or duty on grees, fish, roots, pans, & c. common necessities of life, as to food and utensils. 2dly, Iron, gee, sugar, beetle nut & c. merchandize. And 3dly, the duty of Koyally or Jouldary." p. 214.

believed then this place was "most populous" even in 1706.<sup>13</sup> In the 1780s it grew into much bigger importance when 'Sloop and Boat' and 'Sindoor, Tootea' (or varmilion and blue vitriol) *mahal* were all included in the single farm of Bara Bazar.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the *Ganj* at Sutanuti also acquired importance as it had been the place of the early Indian trading community in the town. The Company's interest in developing this market place has become evident when it decided to make some advance for erecting a new *Ganj* at Sutanuti.<sup>25</sup> This was the only case of financial involvement at public level.

### 3. *The distance factor.*

"As there were no separate places allotted for bazars, they were all held in the publick streets and roads in Calcutta."<sup>26</sup> So land was in dearth for the establishment of bazars in appropriate place. Moreover, "the Regulations of the Police for destroying all the thatched Houses, which has obliged many of the inhabitants to remove without the Boundaries of the Town." This action which was then popularly known as 'Bye Laws' had removed a large number of stalls from the markets as well as from various localities.<sup>27</sup> Hence the number of stalls fell considerably.

For the official regulations the well-planned bazars became a necessity. But there was no scope for liberal permission to erect bazars. Their erections were guided by the distance factor. Surprisingly enough the Company tried to adhere to this principle as strictly as possible. Whenever a new bazar was about to start the farmer or owner of a nearby bazar raised his objection against

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23. A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* p. 96.

24. B. O. R. *Misc. Progs.* 24.5.1788.

25. F. W. I. H. vol. 5. Letter to the court dated 2.2.1769. para 69.

26. C. O. R. *Progs.* 20.4.1781.

27. C. O. R. *Progs* 3.10.1782.

the same. The universal reason behind such objections was the apprehension about the loss of income which the other bazars, established earlier might suffer from the presence of the new one. Whenever this point gave rise to a controversy the Company invariably sided with those who protested that set a very unhealthy trend. Probably for its policy to honour the right of property, the government thought it prudent to extend the same right to a bazar-owner also. So whenever a person tried to open a new bazar he was to satisfy the authority on this distance factor strictly.

The crux of the problem was that there was no clear cut directive on what distance there should be between two bazars. In the immediate suburb of the town, the usual distance of two bazars was 4 to 6 miles.<sup>28</sup> But within the town, it was the practice that the sound of a drum from one bazar should not reach the other one, nearest in the vicinity.<sup>29</sup> No doubt, this rule was not perfect and, this very practice led to several confusions and controversies.

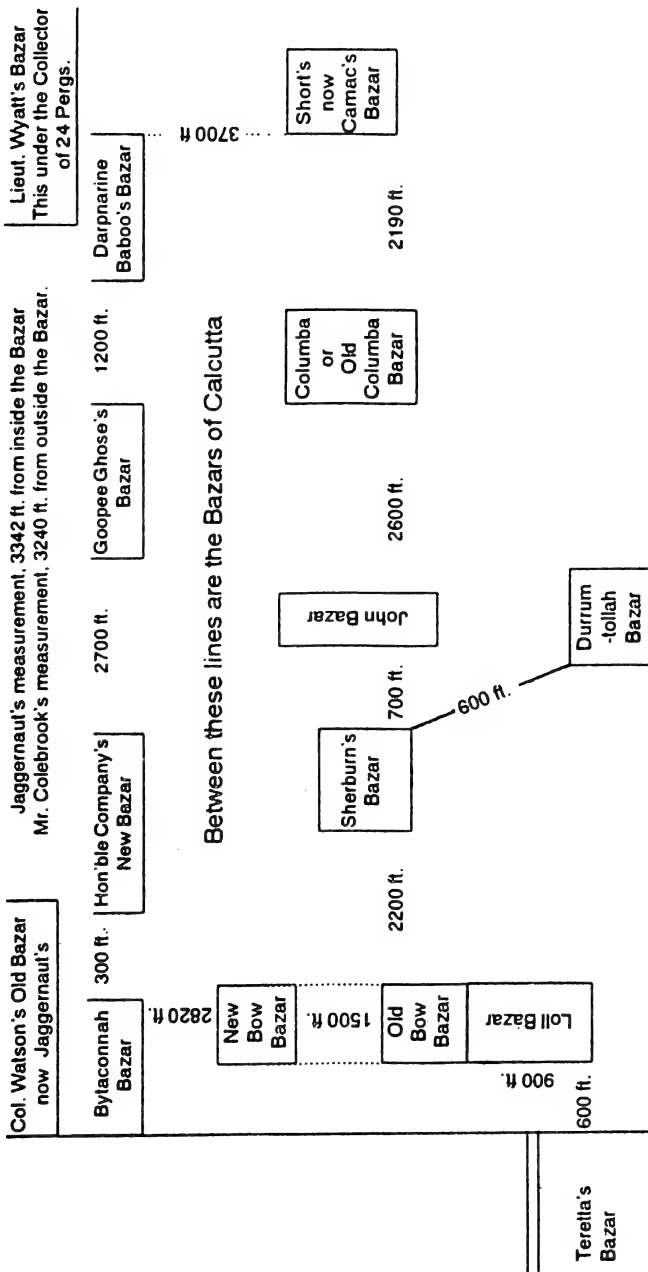
A picture of density of bazars as well as of population in certain parts of the town during those days becomes clear, if one goes through the official records. When the Dewan Ganga Gobinda Singha tried to establish his bazar in Sutanuti, he defended his case by pleading upon the distance factor. He was opposed by Maharaja Nabakrishna. The Maharaja's argument was that he would suffer if the Dewan was allowed to hold his bazar. But actually the distance between the new bazar of the Dewan and that of the Maharaja in Sutanuti was 4000 feet and hence the plea for financial loss on the complainant's part did not stand. On the other hand, the distance between the said bazar and the Company's Mechua Bazar was 2040 feet and, between the former and Kasinath Babu's Ram Bazar was only 1080 feet.<sup>30</sup> Since the Maharaja won after a protracted

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28. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 3.7.1777.

29. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 28.1.1790.

30. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 15.4.1790.



Drawn from the original Source : B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 18.1.1797 ; No. 29.

battle, the uniform adherence to the distance factor appears to be doubtful.

It is clear then, that every bazar was not established on the principle of equi-distance. The distance from Mr. Sherburn's bazar in the Dharmatala area to Mr. Fenwick's was 1800 feet and, from Mr. Camac's bazar to Mr. Fenwick's was 5000 feet.<sup>31</sup> All those bazars were situated in the European dominated part of the town. Now one may consider this factor in the central part of the town which wore more or less a cosmopolitan character. The nearest distance from Mr. Tiretta's bazar at Bogden Garden to Bow Bazar was 3000 feet, from Bow Bazar to the new Bytoconnah Bazar was 2920 feet, from the Bytoconnah to Gopi Ghose's bazar was 2700 feet, from Gopi Ghose's Bazar to Darpanarain Tagore's bazar was 1200 feet, from Darpanarain's bazar to Mr. Short's bazar was 3500 feet, from Mr. Short's bazar to the Colimba Bazar was 2910 feet,\* from the Colimba Bazar to Mr. Sherburn's bazar was 3300 feet. If a circle around these is drawn then, that would be completed if we see the distance from the last mentioned bazar to Mr. Tiretta's bazar was 3700 feet.<sup>32</sup> Though we have records regarding the existence of China Bazar,<sup>33</sup> that was not included in this list. If compared in the present day's context then the distance between Tiretta's bazar in Lal Bazar and China Bazar was not so significant.

From the locations of bazars in the town a picture of population concentration can be drawn. It is important that those bazars as referred to by Holwell more or less acted as catalyst in attracting people for settlement around them. If a line is drawn from the Mechua Bazar in the north to the Bytoconnah in the east and, then to Sherburn's bazar in Dharmatala, the picture

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\* In the appended sketch plan the measurements as shown are different

31. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 18.1.1790. But the appended sketch map does not corroborate the distance measurements given in the text.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *C. O. R. Progs.* 5.9.1781.



becomes clear. This part of the town was thickly populated in comparison to the other parts. Moreover, the concentration of the Europeans and to a some extent the Euresians were noticed around this part. It was the heart of the town's business-district which remained as before for the last one hundred or more years. Hence growth of Calcutta towards other directions was negligible.

#### 4. *Erection and investments.*

Since the right of property was confirmed, the owners of properties became more and more interested in utilising them in the best possible manner. The establishment of bazars meant a fund of ready money available in the term of rent and several other duties.

As the Company was not so solvent, it failed to construct the required number of bazars in Calcutta. Moreover, the principal aim of the Company was to raise rents. It pobably believed that the new investments towards the construction of bazars would not suffice its needs. When the demand for bazars in various parts of Calcutta was persistent the task was left to others.

Often it is said that the acquisition of a bazar was treated as a prized possession in terms of rent.<sup>34</sup> Hence there was an avenue open for indigenous investment. But why was it so? During the period under study Calcutta failed to attract high class as well as caste Indians. Calcutta did not have a traditional landholders community. They, during this period, were in their rudiments in Calcutta. The gradual withdrawal of the Bengali merchants from the maritime trade had distinctly become evident.<sup>35</sup> Having faced an opposition from the Europeans the rich Indians, traditional richmen like Raja Rajballabh and Raja Huzzurimal and the newly opulent banians and farmers of revenue like

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34. P. Sinha, *op. cit.* p. 16.

35. A. Dasgupta, "Upakuler Bharatavarsa, 1500-1800" in *Madhyayuger Bharat* in Bengali ed. by Aniruddha Roy, (Calcutta, 1987).

Maharaja Nabakrishna, Raja Ramlochan and Baranasi Ghose found themselves increasingly cornered in the trading activities. In that atmosphere, they took interest in acquiring properties and gaining returns from them.

The northern part of Calcutta, damaged by the sack of 1756, needed renovations and hence the scope for investment there was wide. Soon after the battle of Palasi the pace of renovation was set in. In 1759-60, Maharaja Mahendra Durlabh Ram Bahadur, the father if Raja Rajballabh had purchased a piece of land on the river-bank in Bag Bazar in the extreme north of the town from Raghu Mitra, the son of the famous "Elack Zamindar" Gobindaram Mitra. The Maharaja then erected a bazar on that land. The exemption from revenue granted to him by the Company's government,<sup>36</sup> is an example of favour extended to the Maharaja for passing through initial trauma. Again the interest shown by the authority in developing the *Ganj* in Sutanuti<sup>37</sup> proved its initial interest in developing that place. Entire Sutanuti was granted to Nabakrishna in perpetuity and, the Company shed all its liabilities. It was obvious that Nabakrishna did not allow others there. But the demand for more bazars in the said place<sup>38</sup> proves that Sutanuti had become greatly populous.

Gradually, it became a matter of prestige among the Indians to own a bazar. It was an instrument for gaining status. Since the establishment of new bazars was a source of so many hazards, they were interested in farming out the Company's bazars in the town. Interestingly enough, there is not a single instance where the Europeans were engaged in such a wide-scale farming. The operation of the 'Bye Laws', opened the opportunities to rich men who took interest in establishing bazars. They were encouraged in holding bazars in their respective lands. If they agreed to pay the customary *jumma* and could convince the

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36. B. O. R. Sayer Progs. 14.11.1794.

37. F. W. I. H. vol. 5. Letter to the Court dated 2.2.1769. para 69.

38. Rev. Depts. G. G. in C. Progs. 15.1.1779.

authority over the distance factor between two bazars, they were allowed to go ahead with their projects.<sup>39</sup> But the permission for bazars on such grounds as the rent of which had already been fixed was usually denied because that could eliminate the possibilities to enhance the *jumma*.<sup>40</sup>

The constant demand for bazars and lucrative returns from them attracted the rich men in various ways. Raja Huzzurimal, one of the most influential Indians at that time, had a piece of land in Bara Bazar. There he opened a bazar without the prior approval of the authority. When asked to remove his unauthorised bazar, he defended his case on the ground that he had not erected bazar and that he had only let his ground to some tenants from whom "he received rent but does not collect any Bazar duties." The strength of this argument was sound. A landholder could utilise his property for the best of purpose and return. But the Company's government was not always in a position to afford this to be effected. If he was allowed then collections of revenue would suffer. The Collector also apprehended that if the Raja was not checked a large number of people might resort to the same practice and the Company would be a loser.<sup>41</sup> So he was prevented.

Generally a farmer or owner of a bazar tried to keep that under his possession even in face of severe challenge. There is only one instance where the owner of the bazar had returned his *sunnud* to the Company. In 1773-4, Raja Rajballabh got a *sunnud* to erect a *ganj* at Bag Bazar for which he was to pay Rs. 150-0-0 per annum. Previously his father had received exemption which was now denied to him. He held it for two years but, returned the same as the bazar was not considered profitable. Behind this move the Raja probably had some other notions. Soon after that event it was complained by some *itmamdars* of

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39. C. O. R. Progs. 20.4.1781.

40. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 29.4.1788.

41. C. O. R. Progs. 29.6.1781.

some nearby areas that Rajballabh had erected an unauthorised bazar for which he had no permission and employed his men to entice the venders to come to his bazar.<sup>42</sup> Later informations are lacking by which it can be proved that Rajballabh actually succumbed to the prevailing rules.

For the policies of the colonial rulers, the rich Indians fixed their eyes on the ownership of bazars. House-building and letting them out was not considered a popular investment in the Indian parts of the town. Hence to get a best return from a piece of land was to set up a bazar.

### 5. *The role of the Banians.*

Very often force and influence were involved in the bazar-setting enterprise. The advantages in this were ably reaped by the banians, a new-born class of substantial influence and affluence in Calcutta. Raja Huzzurimal had lost the battle and had to abolish his bazar at Bara Bazar. But the case relating to Raja Ramlochan, the banian of the President of the Committee of Revenue was too serious. He established his bazar at Arcooly near Bytoconnah without the sanction of the Company. Since the government failed to abolish all unauthorised bazars the farmer was allowed to collect the customary duties from them.<sup>43</sup> Though Ramlochan had abolished his bazar against which complaints had earlier been lodged, he now started another bazar in 15 *Dihis*, so close to the Company's bazar at Bytoconnah. Here also Ramlochan did not have any approval. He ignored all directions to abolish it. Appearing before the Committee the *vakeel* of Ramlochan admitted that his client had no sanction for that bazar. As the huts of the neighbouring people had been demolished Ramlochan just accommodated those displaced persons in his own garden. But this argument was not accepted. The Committee ordered to remove the said bazar within three days.<sup>44</sup> Ramlochan

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42. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 28.3.1794.

43. C. O. R. Progs. 6.5.1782.

44. C. O. R. Progs. 20.5.1782.

was not ready to surrender. He defied the directive. Now the Committee employed its own men in demolishing the said bazar.<sup>45</sup> But the story did not end here. Still complaints were lodged against him. A few days later the bazar-farmer complained that after the removal of that bazar, Ramlochan had set up another bazar on the same land.<sup>46</sup> His actions proved that Ramlochan was determined to erect a bazar in the locality by any means. Now the Committee took stern measures. Ramlochan's *gomostahs* or clerks were arrested. They were released only after their master had executed a bond pledging to restrain himself in future.<sup>47</sup> Ramlochan was not a man to lose heart. Up to this time he wanted to show his strength through an open defiance of the ban imposed on him and made this issue a matter of prestige. This was never allowed by the Company. Ramlochan thought to exploit his position as the banian of the president of the very Committee which passed orders on his acts. But the Company maintained its strictness and did not give any indulgence to any one whatever the stature of the person was. However, after a lengthy tussle, Ramlochan moved through the usual course. He applied for permission to hold a bazar on his ground and, was allowed for an annual *jumma* of Rs. 400-0-0.<sup>48</sup>

The infuence and connections of the banians were always conspicuous in this area. Nabakrishna's stature had become legendary. His acquisition of the *taluk* of Sutanuti proved it explicitly. Like him Dewan Kasinath also obtained a *sunnud* to hold his Ram Bazar for perpetuity on a fixed annual *jumma* of Rs. 750-0-0.<sup>49</sup> It is important to note that Ram Bazar was within the jurisdiction of Sutanuti. Significantly both that bazar and Sobha Bazar (granted to Nabakrishna) were granted on similar terms roughly in the same period. Moreover, Ram Bazar was not too distant from the Bara Bazar—the distance being only

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45. C. O. R. Progs. 27.5.1782.

46. C. O. R. Progs. 5.8.1782.

47. C. O. R. Progs. 3.10.1782.

48. C. O. R. Progs. 24.7.1782.

49. R. B. W. C. Progs. 1.11.1774.

1560 feet.<sup>50</sup> Nabakrishna started his journey along the road of fortune from Sobha Bazar in Sutanuti.<sup>51</sup> He had an eye on it for long and, on 20th July 1774, he secured a perpetual *sunnud* or grant on a fixed annual *jumma* for that bazar.<sup>52</sup>

At least one religious endowment was made by the Company's government when it was a practice to resume them all. "Bermutter" bazar or religious endowment granted to a Hindu Brahmin betrayed the Company's policies. In such cases no rent was charged. This bazar was situated near present Dharmatala and was held by Darpanarain Tagore, another very influential man in Calcutta. It is important to note that when granted by virtue of a *sunnud*, a bazar was officially treated as a property to the awardee and, not as farm.<sup>53</sup> The grant of *sunnud* meant the grant of ownership. As everybody was eager to acquire ownership of properties in the town such *sunnuds* had a vital importance. And a selected few were bestowed with that favour.

Unlike Nabakrishna or Dewan Kasinath, Baranasi Ghose had played a different role. He was then the Dewan of the Company's salt farm. Prior to 1778-79, the Company's bazars and some monopoly rights for vending certain articles like vermilion, blue vitriol etc. had been farmed out to different persons. But mass scale litigations,, embezzlement, absconding etc. resulted in regular deficiencies. The Company could hardly afford these for long. Hence to put an end to it the Company decided to farm those to a single person of substantial standing. Now Baranasi Ghose entered in the field. He was the first person who took into farm all the Company's bazars for the year 1779-80 for the annual *jumma* of Rs. 21,000<sup>54</sup> and by this process initiated a new system.

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50. B. O. R. *Sayer Progs.* 14.10.1794.

51. A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* p. 198.

52. R. B. W. C. *Progs.* 1.11.1774.

53. B. O. R. *Misc. Progs.* 25.5.1787.

54. C. O. R. *Progs.* 11.4.1785.

### 6. *The role of the Europeans.*

Rich Indians were not the only ones involved in the bazars. Some Europeans also took interest in them. Majority of them were even employed in the Company's services. The earliest record of such cases is related to Mechua Bazar. Mr. Francis D'Mello, an employee of the Company had farmed that bazar from about 1755 and held it for nearly twenty years. He had an uninterrupted hold. The income from that bazar had increased very impressively during these years, from Rs. 165-0-0 to Rs. 2016-0-0 per annum and it went to the Company.

Francis had taken a Company's bazar into farm. But in all other cases, the Europeans were involved in erecting their own bazars and, not farming the Company's bazars. Edward Tiretta was the pioneer in this field. Tiretta was the then official Surveyor of the town and had considerable power and influence. There was a place called Bogden's Garden or Jora Bag in the Lal Bazar area, which "might be reserved for the exclusive purpose" of a *Ganj*.<sup>55</sup> But a problem cropped up on the issue of its control and management. Under the instruction from the Governor General and his Council, the Commissioners of Police had first taken possession of the place and refused to hand it over to the Surveyor of the roads. After a very long battle between the police and the revenue officials the ground was occupied by the Collector.

But the government did not have any financial provision to do so. Now it decided to hand it over to no person other than Tiretta. Tiretta took this ground in lease and there was no prior publication inviting others to send their offer. But it was then the practice usual for disposing of public property. Hence it was a case of Tiretta's power and influence which

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55. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 8.5.1775.

56. *C. O. R. Progs.* 30.5.1781.

he had gathered by virtue of his official position. He had already posted his men on official capacity on the same ground. Though he had to withdraw in the face of officials' duel, his secret hand behind the entire matter cannot be ruled out. It is not improper to believe that the Collector and also the Committee of Revenue had fought the battle with the Commissioners of Police to meet Tiretta's ends.

In Tiretta, one may find the beginning of a new story in Calcutta's urbanisation. Tiretta was the first man who could envisage the growing civic needs of a town. He took a considerable interest in well-planned bazars in Calcutta. He proposed to build three separate bazars one for selling meat, another for fish and, the third for selling vegetables. As huge expense was involved in executing such an ambitious scheme, Tiretta offered a fixed *jumma* of Rs. 500-0-0 per annum irrespective of its income and sought a 99 years' lease. He also claimed an exemption from all sorts of revenue for the first three years.<sup>57</sup> He was allowed.

On the footsteps of Tiretta came John Sherburn.\* He had purchased an extensive spot at Dharmatala which was then commonly known as Ismail Sareng's Garden. He also proposed to erect a bazar on that land on 99 years' term.<sup>58</sup> Near Ismail Sareng's garden was the old Dharmatala Bazar. Hence, on the principle of usual distance the offer should have been rejected. The grant of permission to him may be considered as an exposure of colonial bias of the administration which always protected the interests of the white. The Collector in his report, remarked that the proposed bazar would be of immense help as the existing bazars of the town required certain "amendments". Taking the *jumma* offered by Tiretta for his bazar as the basis, the Collector proposed that Sherburn be allowed a lease on an annual *jumma* of Rs. 300-0-0.<sup>59</sup> But the favour extended

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\* Sometime referred to as Joseph Sherburn.

57. C. O. R. Progs. 22.7.1782, 17.9.1782 and 30.9.1782.

58. C. O. R. Progs. 4.11.1782.

59. C. O. R. Progs. 16.1.1783.



to Sherburn can not be measured only by the provisions of the said permission. It was reported that the old Dharmatala Bazar had all along been a flourishing one. In 1773-4, that was farmed for *sicca* Rs. 1327 ; in 1775-6 for *sicca* Rs. 3010 ; and in 1778-9 or *sicca* Rs. 5175. These figures are indicative of its flourishing state. Moreover, the said bazar was owned by the Company itself. With the opening of Sherburn's bazar it was allowed to be ruined.<sup>60</sup>

Though the Company's loss was substantial, Sherburn's act was highly commended by his fellow countrymen who used to reside in the said locality. The market was modern and clean—an uncommon feature for the existing bazars. It brought such a relief to the people around Dharmatala that the Editor of the *Calcutta Gazette* was full of praise for it.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly, Charles Short's proposal for a modern bazar including a section to sell live cattle and a slaughter house was equally encouraged.<sup>62</sup> Like other Europeans, Short also executed a deed with the government. And the provisions were far more favourable than what we have hitherto seen. Short was armed with a unique provision. In future, if he or his heirs would think it fit to use those structures meant for bazar for other purpose, they could do so after giving only a month's notice to the Governor General and his Council.<sup>63</sup> Short claimed that he had to spend more than Rs. 70,000, for his bazar<sup>64</sup> for which he must required better protection.

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60. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 8.10.1793.

61. W. S. Seton-Karr ed. *Selections from Calcutta Gazette* etc. vol. II. Editorial of 11.9.1794 : "We observe with satisfaction that the new bazar from its very eligible situation, has already contributed much to the convenience of the community at large. Such an establishment, from the great increase of the inhabitants and the situation of the Chowringhy houses, has long been wanted."

62. C. O. R. Progs. 31.7.1783.

63. C. O. R. Progs. 6.9.1784.

64. C. O. R. Progs. 24.3.1785

Among others, Camac and Fenwick are very known names. But it is wrong to believe that there was a large scale European participation in this matter. There were also certain specific differences between the Indians and the Europeans. In all the cases the Europeans executed a deed and in majority of cases the terms of the deeds were favourable to them. Never an European's proposal was objected to on the distance factor which was a major reason for dispute among the Indians. The Indians were never eager to execute a deed though in a very few cases they also obtained favour in the nature of *sunnud*. Hence, the natures of the bazars bound to be different. All the bazars erected by the Europeans, were clean and modern in outlook. The legal protection in the shape of time-bound lease encouraged them in developing their bazars. But the Indians were unable to obtain any security of that type. Probably this very factor made them hesitant in developing their bazars. So majority of the bazars in the Indian parts of the town were in a very unhealthy state in comparison to those in the European parts.

#### 8. *Competitions and conflicts.*

When there was a profit, there was a conflict. Whenever a new private bazar was sanctioned, the bazar-farmer (of the Company's bazars) raised his voice of protest. Usually the complaints were related to congruity and finally to financial injuries. The government always calculated the difference of incomes, received as the *jumma* from the newly-sanctioned bazar and, the loss as claimed by farmer or the owner whatever the case might be. Generally the Company was sympathetic towards a complainant and remission in the stipulated sum was sanctioned in some cases.<sup>65</sup> From such actions it may be assumed that the government did not wish to injure the interest of the bazar-farmers or owners.

Since there was no fixed criterion for establishment of a bazar in the town tension among the richmen on this issue was

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65. C. O. R. Progs. 26.4.1784.

a regular feature. The claim for remission probably was a pressure tactic by a complainant. All such claims were examined minutely. Since the method to ascertain the gain or loss from a bazar was very complicated and, depended on a particular *ameen*,<sup>66</sup> the presence of corruption could not be ruled out. So each and every bazar-farmer complained of loss in income on any pretext. The conflict between Baranasi Ghose, once a bazar-farmer and Nabakrishna, the *talukdar* of Sutanuti was one of such conflicts

In 1778, Baranasi Ghose complained of loss of income from the Bara Bazar due to unauthorised vending of *ganja*, an intoxicant, *atash bazey* or fire works and underfarming of "Boat and Sloop Mahal" in Sutanuti by Nabakrishna. Those were exclusively within the jurisdiction of Bara Bazar.<sup>67</sup> Nabakrishna defended himself on the line of the rights enjoyed by a rent-payer over certain areas. He claimed that since he had taken Sutanuti into farm, everything was included in the same grant. In this particular case the loopholes of the Company's administration in Calcutta were seriously exposed. When Bara Bazar was allotted to Baranasi in lieu of a *jumma* then he expected that all the monopoly rights within that Bazar would be exclusively enjoyed by him. On the other hand, Nabakrishna was not a person to lose. He had also taken into farm the *taluk* of Sutanuti in lieu of a *jumma* and he too claimed to have obtained all the rights and privileges included in Sutanuti. Both of them were influential persons and none was ready for compromise.

The *talukdary* grant to Nabakrishna created a number of problems which had not been anticipated before. As the holder of that right, Nabakrishna demanded authority on everything within the jurisdiction of the said *taluk*. Hence, he began to collect duties on certain monopolies for which the said grant

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66. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 15.6.1787.

67. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 23.12.1778.

68. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 7.7.1779.

was silent. To Nabakrishna, the *talukdary sunnud* empowered him the collections of rents and duties in their all denominations. But the root of the problem was different. When Baranasi, a no less influential person than Nabakrishna took into farm all the Company's bazars and monopolies he complained of suffering loss to the tune of Rs. 1600. on those accounts.<sup>69</sup> The government was sure that there was no provision left to it than allowing a remission to Baranasi. But there was no chance to make up the said loss by charging further *jumma* on Nabakrishna. The Company was never ready to sustain a financial loss. Hence, Baranasi was allowed to collect duties on those monopolies from Sutanuti.<sup>70</sup> Judging the financial power and social stature of both the persons it may be said that said arrangement did not bring a tangible solution to the problem for ever.

The influence of Nabakrishna in the Company's administration was well-known. Still he had to face serious competitions. In Sutanuti, Dewan Kasinath obtained a *sunnud* for holding his Ram Bazar and Dewan Ganga Gobinda Singha erected his bazar for which he did not have any approval. Ganga Gobinda was also a man of stature, being the Dewan of the revenue department. Being failed to stop both his competitors, Nabakrishna claimed remission from his *jumma* of Mechua Bazar. It was simply a pressure tactic. He did not claim any such remission in his *jumma* for the entire *taluk* of Sutanuti though all the bazars were within Sutanuti. In his letter dated, 3rd June 1788, to the Collector, he mentioned that in the "last year" he had agreed on an increase of Rs. 1000-0-0 on the condition that both the bazars of Kasinath and Ganga Gobind would be abolished. As that could not be done by the Company, he refused to sign a *cabooleat* or undertaking for a further settlement on the said part of the bazar.<sup>71</sup> Ultimately after a long tussle, Nabakrishna agreed, and the Company had asked the

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69. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 17.5.1779.

70. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 19.6.1779.

71. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 13.7.1789.

Dewan to execute usual engagements with Nabakrishna as the said bazar was within Sutanuti.<sup>72</sup> But actually the Dewan did not succumb to the pressure of Nabakrishna.

Nabakrishna was also locked in a battle with Madan Datta over a bazar. It was complained by Nabakrishna that Madan Datta had established a bazar in his *taluk* without any sanction.<sup>73</sup> As usual Madan Datta pleaded innocence and said that he had just let out his land in rent and he was not liable if the tenants started selling and buying there.<sup>74</sup> Meanwhile reports spread about the rapid growth of the bazar.<sup>75</sup> It may not be proper to conclude that as both Nabakrishna and Madan both belonged to the same caste, they led their individual '*dal*' or group of caste-followers and fought to acquire predominance in the Calcutta society.<sup>76</sup> The basic reason was economic which was incidentally involved the bazars of the town.

The government was totally in a fix when the question arose relating to the right and privileges of a land owner while utilising his land. During the consideration of complaints against Madan Datta, Vansittart agreed in principle, "that a person has a right to let his ground for the most he can."<sup>77</sup> If Madan Datta was allowed that would open the floodgates of so many troubles. The matter was ultimately referred to the Governor General and his Council. In January 1779, the Council decided

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72. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 9.9.1788.

73. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed. vol. 25.9.1778.

74. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 11.11.1778.

75. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 18.11.1778.

76. For such observation see S. N. Mukherjee, "Class, Cast and Politics in Calcutta, 1815-38" in Leach and Mukherjee ed. *Elites in South Asia* (Cambridge, 1970)

77. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 16.12.1778. In the same minute, Vansittart also observed that if a landholder were allowed to use his land for the purpose best suited to him then, "The Public Bazars will be dislocated and the Revenue entirely lost." Hence the official dilemma was clear.

to abolish Madan Datta's bazar.<sup>78</sup> Only three days' notice was given to him to remove the same.<sup>79</sup>

Madan Datta was not ready to lose the fight with his rival, Nabakrishna. When asked to remove his said bazar, Madan pleaded helplessness as he had not settled the vendors there. When the actual removal by the government took place, the shopkeepers erected shops on the other side of the road. Hence another order was issued to prevent them from doing.<sup>80</sup>

Madan Datta's pleadings were not accepted by the government. Hence the basic principle to honour landholders' rights in utilisation of their respective properties legally and for the best of returns were ignored. When Nabakrishna was locked in his fight against Madan Datta one Jagamohan Sooree (or Saw) had also erected his bazar near that of Madan's as alleged. Here the allegations were serious. Jagamohan had not settled any bazar with prior permission. Nabakrishna complained that Jagamohan had employed men who forcibly took away the vendors from his *Hat* Sutanuti and Sobha Bazar to his own bazar. As tension mounted, the Committee of Revenue had to station two guards to protect those vendors of whom Nabakrishna had shown concern.<sup>81</sup> But surprisingly enough neither Nabakrishna asked for an official order to suppress this bazar nor did the Company decide to do that.

But Sukmoy Ray's experience was bitter. He had made the embankment of the river on the west of Ram Bazar and north of Harinath Dewan's Ghat.<sup>82</sup> He also pleaded for a bazar there. But he lost to the owner of Ram Bazar, for whose complaints even a man like Sukmoy was not allowed to erect the same.<sup>83</sup>

78. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 13.1.1779.

79. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 8.1.1779.

80. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 15.1.1779.

81. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 21.11.1778.

82. For a short biography of Raja Sukomoy Roy see, Narendra Nath Laha, *Subarna Banik Katha O Kirit*, in Bengali (Calcutta, 1940 and 1941) 2 vols.

83. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 29.8.1794.

It had been roughly established that the owner of the established bazar should get a preferential treatment when a new bazar was about to come up. But always that could not happen. The attempt of Nabakrishna to get possession of Ram bazar from Kasinath and also of Raja Bazar from Rajballabh, both of which were in Sutanuti, did not materialise. As both the bazars were established upon the *sunnud* of the Company and, as both the awardees were very influential men, those could not be handed over to Nabakrishna. But Nabakrishna was not a total loser. He was granted suitable remissions for the loss sustained by him on account of those two bazars.<sup>84</sup>

The Europeans were also a part of the same story. They also fought with the Indians and often among themselves on this issue. One Kalidas Mitra once proposed to erect a bazar on the corner of the road, a little west of Sherburn's bazar. After receiving complaints from Sherburn on the distance issue, the government declined that offer though the acceptance might result an annual revenue of Rs. 2000.<sup>85</sup> The conflict between Charles Watt and the Ghosals in Kidderpur was a story of prolong tussle. On 4th January 1788, Watt was permitted to hold a bazar there. He had already taken interest in developing the dock there. Meanwhile Joynarain Ghosal, as complained, had established a new bazar on his own and induced the vendors at Watt's bazar to go to his bazar. There was another complaint that Ramnarain and Harinarain Ghosal (belonging to the same family founded by Gokul Ghosal) had erected another bazar just at the foot of the new bridge connecting the road between Calcutta and Kidderpur.<sup>86</sup> This tussle between the Ghosals and Watt could not be resolved.

Similarly, Edward Fenwick had to encounter serious challenge in excuting his plan. Fenwick had started a bazar on his own land

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84. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 19.12.1777.

85. *B. O. R. Sayer Progs.* 14.9.1791.

86. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 3.6.1788.

in Chowringhee against which complaints were lodged by M/s. Camac, Sherburn and Tiretta, all of whom owned bazars.<sup>87</sup> Pending enquiry, the Collector had prohibited any collection in Fenwick's bazar.<sup>88</sup> In face of heavy objections, he was not allowed to run his bazar.<sup>89</sup> Fenwick argued that he "have an indefeasible right as a British subject under protection of the English laws make what use I please of it".<sup>90</sup> Probably this was a first claim of a "British subject" to assert his rights and privileges on his property. Still he lost to his other competitors.

#### 9. *Unauthorised bazars.*

The prospects of profit from bazars and restrictions in setting up a bazar provoked their unauthorised establishments and constructions. The government was also aware of their existence.<sup>91</sup> In some cases, the bazar-farmers had their own lands near the bazars which they took into farm or often some parts of a particular bazar was held on the land held by same farmers. Taking advantage of this position a farmer usually encroached upon the old bazar which he had taken into farm or enticed the vendors in that bazar for going to his own bazar where customary duty was imposed. Consequently the vendors were also charged lesser than the usual demands as fixed by the government.<sup>92</sup> The farmer of the bazar had certain privileges and he could easily misuse those in favour of his own interest.

Since the government made it clear that no unauthorised bazar would be allowed to continue<sup>93</sup> some influential persons restorted to different pleas. In June 1781, the Collector in his report mentioned these unauthorised bazars in the town. They

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87. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 9.12.1788.

88. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 16.12.1788.

89. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 2.1.1789.

90. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 23.1.1789.

91. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. typed vol. 6.6.1778.

92. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. typed vol. 21.5.1778.

93. C. O. R. Progs. 30.5.1781.



included Dingha Bangha New Bazar of Gopee Ghose, Nimtala Ghat of Tonoo Babu, a bazar at Bara Bazar of Raja Huzzurimull, Hatkhola of Radhakissen Soor and Joygopal Soor and Dharmatala of Teekaram Faquir. As per his calculations there were as many as 945 shops in these five bazars.<sup>94</sup> From this list a pattern has clearly emerged. The holders were all Indians and mostly very rich men. Some of them either owned bazar or farmed them for sometimes. Probably having been failed to invest money properly they became desperate and started establishing illegal bazar to face whatever consequence might arise in future.<sup>95</sup> Even the sepoys of the Company rected unauthorised bazar at Chowringhee.

The unauthorised bazars had acquired a distinct type of character. The majority of them were established in the central and northern part of the town. The northern part was inhabited by the natives, mostly Hindu community while, the central had a cosmopolitan character.

As there was no appropriate place earmarked to hold bazars in the town it became increasingly difficult to contain a large number of vendors who regularly gathered in and around the bazars. Moreover, for the operation of the 'Bye Laws' the straw huts were to be removed from the town. Though it is difficult to assess how far the steps were successful. But the fact is, the vendors "still assemble in crowds in Bye Lanes and Comars". When they were removed from one place they used to sit in another.<sup>96</sup> And all these factors were exploited by those persons who wanted to erect bazars without any prior permission. As it was a declared principle of the Company not to allow any bazar on the hired grounds, the landowners' advantages increased. Hence those erected illegal bazars on their own land, had an anticipation to make them regularised in usual course.

Often the bazar-farmers were also involved in such acts. In a letter dated 13th May 1776, the Superintendent of Police com-

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94. *C. O. R. Progs.* 29.6.1781.

95. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 15.1.1779.

96. *C. O. R. Progs.* 31.7.1783.

plained that, "the Great Public Nuisance which many of those Bazars have lately become by the General Exposure of Provisions... in the Highway and the innumerable Shops and Sheds erected thereon." Though some of them were removed, the bazar-farmers were usually reluctant in removing them all. The matter became so serious that the Police chief recommended that henceforth the bazar-farmer be asked to furnish an undertaking to the effect that he would not erect any bazar by encroaching the public road or drain.<sup>97</sup> Consequently the bazar-farmer had to sign such a bond. But in all probability the farmer could not be disciplined. It was only a futile exercise on the part of the government to remove the encroachments from the roads and drains and, there was no adequate fund allotted for that purpose too.

Encroachments on public roads and illegal vending became rampant and were often carried with the connivance of the public servants. In July 1791, the Commissioners of Police mentioned that, "Frequent complaints having been made... that the Gomestahs, having charge of the different Bazars encouraged persons to erect stands and vend their Goods on the high Roads opposite their Bazars, and collected Cowries from the vendors."<sup>98</sup> We have got a list where this practice was rampant and from it the shortage in number of bazars in those areas may be imagined. Those bazars included Mechua Bazar, Bara Bazar, Bag Bazar, Bytocannah, Collimba Bazar, Jaun Bazar—all belonged to the Company; Shyam Bazar, Sobha Bazar, Hatkhola Bazar—all of Nabakrishna; New Bazar and Ram Bazar of Kasinath Babu; Simla Bazar of Nemoo Mitra; Chandney Bazar of Gokul Mitra and Dharmatala Bazar of Gobindaram Mitra.<sup>99</sup> This presents a uniform pattern. All those encroachments were primarily made by the 'natives' and the bazars where such encroachments were usually made situated in the northern and

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97. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 13.5.1776.

98. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 20.7.1781.

99. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 18.5.1787.

to a some extent in the central part of the town leaving the European-dominated part completely free.

10. *The role of the Company in the setting up of bazars.*

The zeal with which the private individuals established their bazars, was totally absent in the Company's quarter. There was a nominal increase in number of the Company's bazar from the days of Holwell to the end of that century. The innumerable conflicts among the rich men for holding a bazar and their unauthorised establishments indicate the demand for bazars and possible rich dividends from them. Still the Company failed to erect adequate number of bazars and to fetch good returns from them.

There are very few instances where the Company took some interest in building or developing bazars in Calcutta. The development of Sutanuti and Simla *ganj* in 1769 had already been mentioned. The Collector once remarked that the holding of bazars on the government land should be the practice. But that could not be done as there was very little land at the government's disposal for the said purpose. Moreover, the government had no botheration regarding the civic needs of the town. Still the problems relating to bazars made the government to think over it. Hence, upon the said report of the Collector, it was once decided to ask him to select places on which bazars could be built.<sup>100</sup>

Certainly paucity of fund tied the hands of the Company. Its involvements in a large number of wars made its position weak. At the same time it failed to generate the required amount of resource to meet its demand. Irony of the situation lies then when we find the Company diverting the resources to other sectors. The Governor General in Council in a letter dated 26th May 1785, to the Committee of Revenue asked to make a scrutiny of those bazars situated on the river-side between Surman's Bridge in the south and the Powder Works in the north. They also asked to utilise the revenue collected from those bazars in

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100. C. O. R. Progs. 3.10.1782.

repariring the roads and building bridges.<sup>101</sup>

In 1787, by demolishing a bazar made of straw huts within the fort, the Company built a pukka bazar.<sup>102</sup> But it was certainly not the policy of the Company to convert all the bazars of that type into 'pukka' structures. No doubt, the government seriously felt the need to have some well-planned as well as clean bazars in some parts of the town. When the Collector was asked to select places, he recommended the construction of five bazars at Bara Bazar, Mechua Bazar, Bow Bazar, Bytoconnah and at Dharmatala. Each bazar would contain at least ten *bighas* of land.<sup>103</sup> Clearly the spots which had been selected by the Collector, formed the nucleus of today's thickly populated central Calcutta. Incidentally the areas around those proposed bazars gradually became the chief business centre of Eastern India. Since the Company had not enough resource it could only erect a bazar at Bytoconnah.<sup>104</sup>

But the government did not lose its supervisory power over them. Even before the battle of Palasi the Company had exercised its authority in regulating the weights and scales in the bazars of Calcutta.<sup>105</sup> Initially, it did not have a separate department to deal with the bazars. The police chief of the town was in charge of the bazars. On 1st September 1784, the Governor General and his Council created a new department in the name of Clerk of the Market and appointed Robert Macfarlane in that office.<sup>106</sup>

The authority had no control on the prices of the goods sold in the bazars neither it had any control over the supplies of provisions. In face of severe and periodic famines in Bengal during the period of our study, the Company could not sit idle

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101. C. O. R. Progs. 6.6.1785.

102. W. S. Seton-Karr. "Selections from Calcutta Gazette" published in *Calcutta Review*, vol. XX XIX.

103. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 29.4.1788.

104. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 6.3.1789.

105. *Selections*. No. 190

106. W. S. Seton-Karr, *Selections from Calcutta Gazette*. vol. I. p. 5.

when the supplies to Calcutta were threatened. The rise in prices meant the clamour for higher wages from all quarters. This Company could not afford. Hence it had to supervise the prices of certain items, specially the grain. It was a practice to specify the prices of grains in the *Nirkhas*.<sup>\*</sup> Those should be exhibited in the shops and the sellers could not charge more than what had been fixed. But the traders generally defied these. They produced false *Nirkhas* everyday and sold grain at a higher price than what was specified. The Company always asked the Collector to maintain a constant vigil on them but, it refused to empower him to arrest this practice effectively.<sup>107</sup>

### 11. Conclusion

A large majority of the Indian towns got their roots in the bazars. In Calcutta during the period of early colonial rule the importance of the bazars can be noticed. The constant tussle relating to their control and the involvement of rich Indians and in some cases even of Europeans confirms the importance of the bazars. No doubt a good amount of indigenous wealth was invested in them. As the bazars could generate an easy flow of income and that too in shape of daily liquid cash, their importance were felt increasingly.

But the most noteworthy thing was the apathy on the part of the Company's government. It can be assumed that the Company was also aware of the good returns from the bazars. Still it failed to erect them properly even though there were constant demands to erect them. It is a paradox when the policy of the Company was to maximize its revenue, it could not build a sufficient number of them.

The erection of bazars and their maintenance were the parts of civic administration of the town and that was not properly looked after by the government. It remained satisfied simply by passing the responsibility on the shoulders of the private persons. The interest of those persons had already been discussed.

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\* Meaning a price-list which was essential for the shopkeepers to make the buyers acquaint with them.

107. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 6.6.1788,

## TAX, TOLL AND POLICE

As *zamindar* of Calcutta, the English East India Company was responsible for the annual revenue of this town. This was the primary function of its administration in the town. Beside land revenue there were a lot of other sources from which tax and duties were realised. Prior to the Maratha raids in the 1740s Bengal was one of the most prosperous provinces in the Mughal empire. The trade records of the foreign companies prove this fact. The Nawab of the province used to receive a good amount by way of different taxes and imposts levied upon the merchandise which had been transacted in and around Calcutta.<sup>1</sup> In later years the East India Company stepped into the shoes of the Nawab. Finance was needed to rule the town and the English tried to procure finance by stimulating the revenue of the country. Firminger has correctly noted this: "It was essentially as revenue collectors that the English entered into the actual occupation of the country, and it was the exigencies of the revenue service that compelled them to elaborate a system of Government."<sup>2</sup>

From the very start the policy of the Company's government was to maximize the collections in Calcutta. For its basic necessities, municipal arrangements and security system, Calcutta needed money. Money could be mobilised by raising private and public funds. The Company had a lot of works to do in Calcutta. It had to guarantee the property-owners in the town

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1. *The Cambridge Economic History of India*. vol. I. p. 407.
  2. W. K. Firminger, *Affairs of the E. I. Company (Being the Fifth Report ...)*. vol. 1. p. iii.

and had to protect their interests. For that it had to offer certain civic amenities even if that meant a loss of revenue. Above all, it had to maintain a police force to instil confidence in the minds of the people.

## PART—I

### Revenue Administration

#### 1. *The Company's approach to its Zamindary*

With the procurement of the right of those three villages in 1698, the Company thought to have acquired the sole proprietary rights. But under the provisions of the Mughal land settlements it was not so. The Company had purchased those villages as a *zamindary* for which it had no property right by Indian laws but only a partial property-right if construed in the sense of laws then prevailing in England. The Company was "to pay, not as *revenue* to the Imperial Exchequer but as *rent* of the jagir."<sup>3</sup> So nomenclature was a problem from the start and the position of the Company was not clear. To keep its *zamindary* the Company had to remit revenue regularly and to achieve that end, it should have a secured collection from its *zamindary*.

The Company's only aim before the battle of Palasi was to protect its trade and to give such protection to others who had trade alignments with it. So the Company wanted to have a territorial right over areas where its centre of trade was situated. Therefore it aimed at "having a fortified settlement whose permanence and stability could be assured by the possession of estates yielding a steady supply of revenue". The purchase of *zamindary* rights and then the construction of the Fort William "ensured a regular income and facilitated the movement of their trade."<sup>4</sup> Hence revenue received was diverted to some other purposes.

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3. A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* p. 48.

4. S. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.* pp. 210-11.

The motive of trade-benefit was, therefore, always present whenever the Company purchased a piece of land. When revenue was raised to finance commerce, administration suffered. The purchase of Simla and Johnnagore may be taken as examples of this. Holwell, under whose endeavour these two places were bought, had to convince his superiors in the Company that such purchase would bring profits and this profit-motive was always active in the minds of those persons. But before 1757, the Company's hands were tied. It could not formulate its own revenue policy independently. "It could sell, grant, or lease the manores and unoccupied lands, and from the occupiers of the tenanted lands it could demand a rent not exceeding three rupees a bigha ;"<sup>5</sup> Hence the only way left to the Company, was to raise the area under occupation by new settlements within the bounds of Calcutta. The strict collection of revenue from the inhabitants was also essential. Holwell believed that "with our utmost vigilance and attention, we shall be able to make too much of the Company's revenues."<sup>6</sup> He put forward certain schemes for enhancing revenue. But they were not approved of by the Company's higher authorities.

Indiscriminate enhancement of revenue was not the only solution to enrich coffer. The huge burden of taxation might result in the desertion of people from the town for which the Directors asked their officials at Calcutta to govern the inhabitants "with mildness and equity."<sup>7</sup> They also "strongly recommended the encouraging inhabitants, and in particular relieving the poor, and preserving them from oppression."<sup>8</sup> Probably the Directors visualised such a revenue policy which would ultimately lead to a population-growth in the town and promote the amount of revenue in the long run.

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5. C. R. Wilson, *The Early Annals*. vol. I. p. 194.

6. J. Z. Holwell, *India Tracts*. p. 200.

7. *Selections*, No. 175.

8. *Selections*, No. 216.



Whatever caution the Directors might have sounded the need for money in all levels was very high. At the public level the effort was always to maximize revenue.<sup>9</sup> The said thrust did not come all of a sudden. Even in 1733, the Council at the Fort William realised that "the assessment of the black inhabitants had made them uneasy."<sup>10</sup> The Company's policy relating to its *zamindari* prior to the battle of Palasi was direction-less. At the one hand, its trading compulsion required the maximization of its incomes and, on the other, its administrative problems relating to the inhabitants of the town warranted restraint.

But the battle of Palasi completely changed the situation. Soon after the battle, Clive in his letter dated, 26th July 1757, expressed his dissatisfaction over the incomes from the town. He advised the enhancement of the same.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately it had become an established practice with the Company's government to force the inhabitants to pay for the civic works in the town.<sup>12</sup> Hence, the position of the Collector General\* had become increasingly important.<sup>13</sup> If one goes by the statistics provided by A. K. Ray then, he may find that in 1704, the total revenue of all denominations amounted to Rs. 5,760. That amount increased to Rs. 1,07,131 by 1757.<sup>14</sup> The rate of growth

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\* Later the post was named, Collector.

9. For details see R. Sen, *The Economics of Revenue Maximization, 1757-1793: Bengal, A Case Study* (Calcutta, 1988).
10. Firminger, *Alfairs of the E. I. Company*. vol. I. p. lxxi.
11. *Ibid.* p. xlvii.
12. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 3. Letter to the Court, dated 30.10.1762 para, 57. The inhabitants were to pay for the construction as well as repairing of roads etc., "especially as the former Ground rent for the Town of Calcutta was rated extremely low being only from two to three Rupees the Beega and amounting in the whole to Rs. 17,744-12-1. We determined therefore to double this Tax."
13. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 5. Letter to the Court dated, 14.9.1767. para-30. It was stated that, "After mature Deliberation on the best Method of disposing of the Calcutta Lands, we have come to the Resolution of Keeping them in our Hands under the management of the Collector General for another Year in Hopes that we may be able During that Time to ascertain the real Value of them."
14. A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* p. 138.

in total receipts was roughly around 19 times. But during the same period, the ground rent increased from Rs. 1920. to Rs. 17,030. Here the rate of growth was only less than 9 times. The Company's problems could be imagined. Either it failed to reclaim new lands and to put them under habitation or, the influx of the stationary population was tardy. Still for the administration of the town in its existing nature as well as for the growth of its resource was to be mobilised.

## 2. *Sources of revenue*

To avoid any confusion, the Company more or less followed the Mughal principles in its administration in Calcutta. "The revenue arising from the Land is denominated *Mahl*, and all Duties go under the Denomination of *Syer*."<sup>15</sup> All the records left by the Company are clearly defined on this line. The most important of all those was the ground rent, then usually denominated as *mahl*.

There were several taxes and duties other than ground rent to which the people of Calcutta were subjected to. Not a single item of daily necessity was spared from duties. One of the Company's major source of income was its custom duties. All the articles imported into Calcutta were taxed. To help the collections at this town, those articles could not be charged at their places of origin.<sup>16</sup> Even the ferry boats for passengers as well as goods transport were brought under taxation in 1738.<sup>17</sup> The duties on ferry boats certainly enhanced the prices of goods. The goods transported by roads were also charged. There are records of *rahdarry* or road-cess which were ultimately withdrawn during the later days of the century. But that was aimed not at relieving the consumers but at avoiding

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15. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 17.5.1779.

16. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 8.7.1774. "It is an Order of Government that all Goods coming to Calcutta shall pay Duties only at the place."

17. Holwell, *India Tracts* p. 223.

a cumbersome process and corruption involved in it. The custom and allied imposts raised the prices of commodities and with them also the cost of living. Similarly, the cost of dwellings also increased. The duty on lime and timbers, the two major items of house-building, was introduced in 1752. Even purchasing and vending of old irons and old nails were first farmed in 1751.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, there was *metrifeh* or a type of poll tax, collected with the ground-rent from certain particular sects and castes of the Hindu community.

During this period another principal source of the government's income was the *Chowkedarry* tax or police tax. This tax was first introduced in 1773 for defraying the cost of policing in the town. Though this tax was withdrawn by its name in the far end of the century, it remained under the name of house tax from 1794.

### 3. *Collection of revenue*

It has already been observed that the main thrust of the Company's administration in Calcutta during the period, was the collection of revenue. It may be said that urban administration of the Company in Calcutta was basically its revenue administration. It is usually said that the Company received the official sanction for its revenue administration in the month of July, 1736.<sup>19</sup> Probably the Company obtained a permission in fixing taxes independently.

The Company's administration was in no way an innovation. It inherited the pattern of town administration from the past. "The town of Calcutta is divided into four principal districts,

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18. *Ibid.* pp. 224-25. But the duties under this head were abolished in 1758. Also see *F. W. I. H.* vol. 2. Letter from the Court dated, 3.3.1758. para-101.

19. S. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.* p. 62.

under the denomination of *Dee Calcutta* (under which *John Nagore* is included) *Govindpoore*, *Soota Nutty*, and *Bazar Calcutta*; to each of which, and to the great Bazar, are appropriated a district Cutcherry, whose accounts are all transmitted to, and center in the great Cutcherry of Dee Calcutta."<sup>20</sup> This arrangement continued with certain changes. In 1763, the entire town was divided into five 'Grand Divisions' which were again subdivided into twenty *dihis*.<sup>21</sup> The collectors of revenue were called *itmamdars*. They were salaried employees of the government.<sup>22</sup>

The administration from the beginning was strict about collecting revenue. Clive advised to undertake a policy of regular measurement of the holdings to enhance the rent.<sup>23</sup> It was then widely believed by the administration that the 'natives' were habituated in concealing their actual holding in order to evade proper assessment. So the Company introduced a system of decennial measurement in the town. Probably this was the first time when the inhabitants could realise the actual importance of the official documents viz. the *pattas*. No possession was valid unless that was supported by a *patta*. Land measurements were so thorough that fourteen months were required to complete them in the years 1774-5. By this measurement, the Company recovered 800 *bighas* of land (which were termed as *Bashee* i.e. excess) on which rent was fixed for the first time.<sup>24</sup> An *ameen* was posted in each division to look after the measurement. The government exercised great caution in selecting its 'native' servants. An *ameen* had to furnish two responsible 'natives' as his securities.<sup>25</sup> Calcutta was again measured in 1788. But now the excess land amounted to only 60 *bighas* 14 *cottah* 11½ *chittacks*.<sup>26</sup> In

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20. Holwell, *India Tracts* p. 207.

21. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 17.9.1789.

22. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 29.4.1788.

23. Firminger, *Affairs of the E. I. Company*... vol. I. p. xcvi.

24. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 17.9.1789.

25. *Ibid.*

26. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 29.4.1788.

comparison with the figure under the same head in 1775, it was very negligible. This also proves the intensiveness with which the earlier measurements had been completed.

The total area of occupation by the *ryots* in Calcutta did not change very much during the whole century. The territorial expansion of the town was not of any great importance. Hence the collection of ground rent did not rise by leaps satisfying the revenue ambitions of the masters. Once in the year 1732, the Council at the Fort William tried to raise the rent, "which being rumoured abroad, they received a peremptory Perwannah, from the Soubah, forbidding them."<sup>27</sup> The Nawab's administration did not allow ground rent to be increased arbitrarily.

The position of public revenue in the town may be understood from the following chart :

Year	Total Revenue (Jumma)	Source
1704	Rs. 5,760	A. K. Ray, p. 138.
1710	16,440	A. K. Ray, p. 138.
till 1751	39,000 (net average)	Holwell ( <i>Interesting Historical...</i> ) p. 217.
1752	73,000	Holwell ( <i>Interesting Historical...</i> ) p. 217.
1752	46,570	A. K. Ray, p. 138.
1753	1,13,000	Holwell ( <i>Interesting Historical...</i> ) p. 217.
1754	1,14,000	Holwell ( <i>Interesting Historical...</i> ) p. 217.
1755	1,20,000	Holwell ( <i>Interesting Historical...</i> ) p. 217.
1757	1,07,131	A. K. Ray, p. 138.
1762	1,14,774	A. K. Ray, p. 138.
1771- 2	1,11,724- 6- 7- 0	Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 28.10.1776.
1773- 4	1,09,862- 6- 7- 0	Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 28.10.1776.
1777- 8	1,24,741- 9-16- 0	Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 19.5.1778.
1785- 6	1,13,542- 9- 1- 0	B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 17.8.1786.
1785	1,22,418	A. K. Ray, p. 138.
1786- 7	1,29,157- 6- 8- 0	B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 13.3.1787.
1787- 8	1,29,884-11-13- 1	B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 3.6.1788.
1789-90	1,24,688- 0-15- 3	B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 3.8.1791.
1790-91	1,24,593-12-17- 3	B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 30.4.1790.
1790-91	1,25,603- 8- 6- 3	B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 3.8.1791.
1792- 3	1,07,382- 7-16- 0	B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 20.9.1793.
1793- 4	1,07,635- 9-11- 2	B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 5.8.1794.

27. Holwell, *Interesting Historical Events...* parts 1-3 together (London, 1766-1771; 2nd ed.) p. 222.

The difference between the total *jumma* of 1757 and that of 1793-4 was negligible. In fact, the amount has actually fallen if one takes into consideration the figure given by Holwell for the year 1753. During his own tenure as the *zamindar* of the town, Holwell was never satisfied with the revenue arrangements. He complained of the poor collections "though the tenants were daily increasing, and the lands grew more fully occupied and cultivated."<sup>28</sup>

As there is no figure to suggest what Holwell meant when he spoke of "daily increasing" tenants in Calcutta, it is very difficult to reach such a conclusion. But undoubtedly Holwell made a very serious endeavour to put the Calcutta lands under tenancy.<sup>29</sup> But in spite of such efforts the size of actual collection was not noteworthy. During the entire second half of eighteenth century one can see a considerable difference between the estimated "jumma" of the town and its actual collections.

It is, however, improper to conclude that Calcutta was only a den of paupers. In most of the cases, rich persons, Europeans and Indians alike evaded payment of dues. They always refused to pay "garden rent" for the gardens held by them. These gardens were chiefly in the jurisdiction of the *Dihis*, the immediate suburbs of the town. Having failed to collect this rent from those rich men, the farmer of the *Dihis*, refused to take charge of the collection of such rent since 1773. The Europeans all along were suffering from a sense of racial superiority. Rich Indians, many of whom were banians of the English, tried to exploit their connections with their masters. As a result there grew an all round tendency towards thinking oneself to be immuned from law and exempted from taxes.

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28. *Ibid.* p. 216.

29. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 1. Letter to the Court, dated 18.1.1754. Enclosure No. 2 of the Letter which happened to be a copy of a letter dated, 5th July 1753, written by Holwell to the Council at the Fort. Holwell stated that "...there remains only 321 begas of the Hon'ble Company's ground untenanted including the Fort, churches, gardens, cutchery (etc.)s, that there is no vacant space in the bounds."

During the administration of Warren Hastings, the Company's government undertook a series of experiments for enhancing its revenues throughout the province. But administration was not one of success so far as Calcutta was concerned. Arrears relating to various heads were always staggering and the Collector of the town was directed to undertake collections in the "severest manner for the Payment of Arrears."<sup>30</sup> But that instruction was of no effect. One of the major problems at this time, was the imposition of *Chowkedarry* tax or police tax in Calcutta. That was included in the same bills for ground rent subjecting all holders of land to it. That was resented by the inhabitants in general and so they evaded payments causing the ultimate accumulation of balance in the total collections.<sup>31</sup> To close the gap the government put pressure upon its 'native' officials. That was probably the only way open to it. The *itmamdars* of the town were confined for their poor performance and, the *sezawals* or police sepoy were appointed in their place.<sup>32</sup>

The picture of total revenue settlement during these days could not be appreciated by A. K. Ray who seems to be under the illusion of "the gradual progress of the town."<sup>33</sup> But the fact was totally different. In spite of the best efforts made by the administration, the collections did never match its expectations. Even in the fag end of the century the balance posed a serious problem. The revenue targets had always remained to be the unrealised aims of the administration. Calcutta suffered because of this. Promotional schemes could not be set in foot as money had always been a constraint and economy was always a rule with the administration.

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30. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 31.3.1777.

31. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 19.6.1777.

32. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 16.1.1778. For the rise of the *sezawalls* and *amins* during this period see R. Sen, *New Elites and New Collaboration*.

33. A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* p. 138.

#### 4. *Rent and allied taxes*

From the earliest available records it is found that in 1704, the total ground rent amounted to Rs. 1,920.<sup>34</sup> In 1706, the total amount of inhabited land in Calcutta was only 841 and 1/2 *bighas*.<sup>35</sup> Holwell has detailed out the revenue structure. In 1752, the ground rent was collected from a total amount of 5472 *bighas* and 1/2 *cottah* at the average rate of three rupees per *bigha*.<sup>36</sup> If computed on this rate figure which comes out is Rs. 16,416 more or less. This figure corresponds to that supplied by Mr. A. K. Ray and seems to be tenable for the aforesaid year.<sup>37</sup> Hence the increase in the ground rent between 1706 and 1752 was more than 6 and 1/2 times. It means the concentration of population in the first half of the eighteenth century was rather considerable. As there was no scope to enhance the existing rates of ground rent during those days, the increase in rent meant the growth of the population in the settlement. More and more land was brought under tenancy.

But the figures given by A. K. Ray for the ground rent between 1757 and 1785 do indicate the increase in the amount of inhabited land in the town.<sup>38</sup> In 1788, the total amount of ground rent was Rs. 16,380-15-0 which is to be added to the amount of Rs. 960-13-10-0, the annual rent for the *taluk* of Maharaja Nabakrishna in Sutanuti.<sup>39</sup> Hence the total amount of ground rent was Rs. 17,341-13-5-0.

Under new political atmosphere protection to the right of property induced the inhabitants to secure it in Calcutta. The security of such rights could be acquired by paying the official

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34. *Ibid.*

35. C. R. Wilson, *The Early Annals*. vol 1. p. 193.

36. Holwell, *India Tracts*. p. 207.

37. A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* p. 138.

38. *Ibid.*

39. B. O. R. *Misc. Progs.* 29.4.1788.



dues regularly. In this context, the Company exploited the ground rent for its own ends. Though it was officially declared to utilise the rent for the civic amenities, we seldom have any record of this being done. In 1762, it was found that the ground rent was charged on 6057 *bighas* 13 *cottah* of land which yielded Rs. 17,744-12-1-0 annually. Hence the rate was less than three rupees per *bigha* per year on an average. Now the government observed that since the value of land in Calcutta had considerably improved, the inhabitants should pay a rent double the existing one.<sup>40</sup> But the available informations do not suggest that the rent was actually doubled.

From a record of 1788 one may get somewhat a detailed information relating to the rent structure in the town.<sup>41</sup> This is given in the table below.

1.	@	Rs. 3	per	<i>bigha</i>	charged	on	5091	<i>bighas</i>	11	<i>cottah</i>	$\frac{1}{2}$	<i>chittack</i>
2.	@	2	"	"	"	"	4	"	8	"	8	"
3.	@	1-8	"	"	"	"	1	"	0	"	12	"
4.	@	1-4	"	"	"	"	27	"	7	"	4	"
5.	@	1	"	"	"	"	41	"	17	"	8	"
6.	@	0-6-2	"	"	"	"	154	"	19	"		
7.	@	0-6-12-2°	"	"	"	"	2323	"	12	"	4	"

*The sixth line of the table indicates the holding of Colone! Watson in Kidderpur where he started building up the dock and the seventh line indicates the holding of Maharaja Nabakrishna in Sutanuti.*

From a reading of the aforesaid table it can be said that Maharaja Nabakrishna could exact the maximum available benefit while procuring the perpetual enjoyment right of the *taluk* of Sutanuti. Though Colonel Watson also received certain

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\* 4 *cowri* = 1 *gonda*  
 20 *gonda* = 1 *anna*  
 16 *anna* = 1 *rupee*

40. *Selections*, No. 581.

41. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 29.4.1788.

favour, he had to bear a tremendous responsibility in the construction of the dock. The small holders were never favoured as the maximum amount of land was charged at the highest available rate. It vindicates the Company's unwillingness in attracting people in increasing number in the town by offering land in low rates. But that favour was shown to Nabakrishna. While granting him the *taluk* at Sutanuti, the Governor General and his Council asked him to "secure the Satisfaction and Content of the Riotts and other Inhabitants by his good management, causing a daily increase of Husbandary and Prosperity."<sup>42</sup> This was the only instance where the Company's government officially expressed its desire to attract people for organizing habitation in the town.

Rent and bills were inter-related since the instrument of property-holding was *patta*. So the payment of ground rent meant security to a land owner. The holders of lands were to pay a *patta-selami* when the *patta* were granted to them. In practice, the *patta-selami* meant the cost for measurement of land.<sup>43</sup> Besides this, the Indians had to pay a tax for the maintenance of the secretary of the *katcharry* while a *patta* was transferred. The *patta-selami* was fixed and the rate was 6 rupees and 4 annas irrespective of the area of the holdings. But five per cent of the total price of a piece of land, for which the new *patta* was to be issued, was charged as the fee of the secretary. In excess of these, two rupees was charged as the cost of measurement. But the amount received under this head was spent by the Company during the annual *punyaha* or opening of yearly accounts.

A large number of taxes on land and properties was never an incentive and the first fire of discontent about this was lit by the weavers. The weavers of Sutanuti refused to pay the secretary's fees and the *patta-selami* while taking new *pattas*.<sup>44</sup>

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42. Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs. 9.6.1778.

43. R. B. W. C. Progs. typed vol. 23.7.1773.

44. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 23.5.1776 and Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs. 9.7.1776.

But the Company was not ready to extending favour to them.<sup>45</sup> The weavers had a special status in the history of Calcutta. They were the only artisan community who had helped considerably in growing habitation in Calcutta. Their fast decadance however, made them irrelevant in the eyes of the rulers.

In the long run the Company's administration began to appreciate the real nature of the problem. A considerable time was wasted in the process of each and every transfer of land. In the government circles it was widely believed that the Indians were in general reluctant to take new *pattas* for their holdings. Unofficial transfer of properties from the hands of the sellers to that of the buyers was there and it was perhaps increasing in number. The government was not aware of this and a large amount of its revenues was thus defrauded. Those who participated in this practice had no difficulty in doing it. As occupiers of a plot of land, they could sustain their occupancy rights by simply remitting the usual ground rent from time to time. To make land transfers easy and to save the revenue of the government the administration withdrew the fees for measurement on 24th March 1785,<sup>47</sup> and the Secretary's fees on 16th January 1789.<sup>48</sup> The government did not spare the Europeans from taxation. They had to pay a tax of five per cent on the total price of a house at the time of its purchase.<sup>49</sup> Only the purchase of house-properties involved such a tax.

As the authorities of the urban settlement the Company was expected to maintain a show of parity among the various races in the town as between the various religions and castes

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45. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 24.7.1778.

46. *B. O. R. (Judicial) Progs.* 14.3.1791. Often it was found that rent had been due from a piece of land which had already been changed hand. In such cases, the dues were usually collected from the occupiers only irrespective of period.

47. *C. O. R. Progs.* 24.3.1785.

48. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 16.1.1789.

49. *Selections.* No. 176.

available there. That was essential for maintaining law and order. But that did never happen. There were certain taxes relating to land which were imposed only on the lower caste Hindus. Probably the Company failed to alter the Mughal arrangements. The persons who were subjected to such taxes, were chiefly the toilers or the service people. They included washermen, fishermen etc. The tax which was widely imposed during the period of our study was, *metrifeh*. This was attached to the ground rent. Although there was *chowkedarry* or police tax in the town, persons who paid *metrifeh* had to pay *kotwali*.<sup>50</sup> That was also a type of police tax and the fund received from this head was usually spent for night—watch in certain localities. The rate of *metrifeh* was never uniform throughout the town.<sup>51</sup> The rates were comparatively high in Bazar Calcutta and in Sutanuti. The mode of taxation and its utilisation were glaring pictures of exploitation. The government did not tax high caste Hindus or the Muslims.

There was another tax called *hissabanah*. It was charged at a rate of one anna per *bigha* of land per annum.<sup>52</sup> There are two versions of this tax. Often it was stated that the Hindus were subjected to it.<sup>53</sup> But actually those persons who

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50. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 29.4.1788.

51. Rev. Depts. G. G. in C. Progs. 10.2.1790. *Metrifeh* varied in its rate according to the situation of the place and the rank of the owner of a piece of land. The rates were as follows :

- a. Bazar Cal. from 1 anna 4 gonda to Rs. 4 and 8 annas per Yr.
- b. Dihi Cal. 9 gonda to Rs. 2 and 8 annas per Yr.
- c. Arccoli 2 annas to Rs. 2 and 10 annas per Yr.
- d. Simla 4 annas to Re. 1 and 8 annas per Yr.
- e. Sutanuti 1 anna 4 gonda to Rs. 4 and 12 annas per Yr.
- f. Bag Bazar 4 annas to Re. 1 per Yr.

*The tax was "added when a new pottah is taken out by a person Subject to the Tax, who has purchased from a person not Subject thereto. So it is deducted when one not liable thereto." To avoid complexity, the Collector proposed to levy the tax on certain professions only without distinction of caste. . . . .*

52. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 11.4.1791.

53. *Ibid.*

paid *kotwali*, were to pay this tax also.<sup>54</sup> Usually three to four annas were charged for each *patta* per annum. Initially this was a tax introduced to raise a fund from which the *mohriers* or clerks of the revenue *katcharry* used to get their *dasturi* or commission. But gradually the fund was appropriated by the government for its own purposes. Only a part of it was spent during the annual *Durga* and *Charak pujas*. From the report of the Collector<sup>55</sup> it was found that in 1787-88, only 3367 persons paid this tax. If it was paid by the low-caste Hindus then, in 1787-88, only 3367 of the low-caste Hindus had land in their own names in the town.

A large number of tax often provoked the assesseees to evade them. Initially, the Company resorted to applying physical punishments on those who failed to pay their dues.<sup>56</sup> The government also enforced attachment of the immovable properties of those who defaulted for the recovery of revenue-arrears. But it was very difficult for the government to force the Europeans to remit the dues in time. Usually they were the major defaulters in payment of garden-rents.<sup>57</sup> Having failed to recover the dues from them as rents for their gardens situated in the 15 *Dihis*, adjacent to Calcutta, the farmer of the *Dihis* transferred them to the Collector of the town. Still the situation did not improve much.<sup>58</sup>

Often the holder of a piece of land disposed of his property just to evade the dues of the government resulting the absence of new *pattas* even after the transfer of ownership. Having failed to check such practice it was ultimately decided that for the arrear of revenue the former owner of a land be held responsible

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54. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 24.4.1788.

55. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 29.4.1788.

56. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 17.3.1778.

57. B. O. R. Land Rev. & Misc. Progs. 6.5.1788.

58. The Garden-Rents on A/c. of 1793-4 due Rs. 4976-4-14-2 (B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 27.5.1794). The same accumulated for 1794-5 was Rs. 5440-0-14-2 (B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 29.5.1795)

when his land was sold out. For any arrear the new purchaser should not be disturbed.<sup>59</sup> The motive of the government was clear. It wanted to secure the customary fees which were connected with land transfer.

For long the Company's government had been extending certain favours to the Europeans relating to rents etc. On 21st September 1781, the Governor General in Council decided "to prohibit the levying of Distress on the Lands of the European Inhabitants of Calcutta account the Arrears of Revenue due to them to Government."<sup>60</sup> But this policy did not succeed. So the Collector was directed to recover balance by selling out the gardens owned by the Europeans beyond the limits of Calcutta. They had also asked to send names of those employees of the Company who had been in arrears so that the arrear amounts could be recovered by way of such deductions from their respective salaries.<sup>61</sup>

The Company ultimately had to appreciate the problem of owners of land resulting from the complex nature of tax structure. Hence upon the order of the Governor General in Council dated 21st May 1788, those taxes, such as *kotwali*, *hissabanah* etc. were withdrawn. Another chief reason behind the said withdrawal was the small amount revenue-yield arising from such taxes. Probably often those amounts did not even cover the establishment costs. But *metrifeh* was not withdrawn. It was now regulated on new principles.<sup>62</sup> This was henceforth imposed on certain professions only "without distinction of caste."<sup>63</sup> Previously, the tax was imposed on the holdings owned by a person subjected to such a tax. Whenever the said land was transferred to a person who did not belong to such a caste in Hindu community, it was very difficult to waive *metrifeh*. Under

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59. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 23.8.1790.

60. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 7.5.1792.

61. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 24.6.1788.

62. Rev. Dept. G. G. in C. Progs. 10.2.1790.

63. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 29.4.1788.

the new arrangement, the profession of the holder was to be ascertained first while imposing a *metrifeh* upon him. But what those professions were, it is difficult to trace out.

### 5. *Taxation on Goods.*

As already stated goods arriving in the town were all taxed. Hence *sayer* duties formed a major part of the government income. With the growth of the town, the collections from this head also witnessed a considerable increase. As duties were imposed on all items transacted in Calcutta, the yield from the *sayer* duties was obviously good. The bazars in the town were the main source from where the revenue was secured. How the bazar duties were collected in the town even prior to 1757 can be understood from a study of the Bara Bazar in Calcutta. Holwell says that the Bara Bazar was "farmed out in three partitions (but generally held by the same person) under the heads of, first, *Teh Bazary* (*sic*), or duty on greens, fish roots, *pans*, &c. common necessities of life, as to food and utensils. 2dly, Iron, *Gee*, sugar, betel (*sic*) nut &c. merchandize. And 3dly, the duty of *Koyally* or Jouldary."<sup>64</sup> The collections under the first head from 1738 to 1752 marked a steady increase. Similar increase was noticed in other cases also.<sup>65</sup> That Calcutta should suffer from food scarcity seemed to be likely because of the duty structure in those days. Rice and grain when imported paid a duty which was levied on weight, but when exported from the town a duty was levied on the price of these commodities. Both rice and grain

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64. Holwell, *India Tracts*, p. 214.

65. *Ibid.* pp.214-16. Holwell has detailed out the collections. Under the first head in 1738, the collections were recorded only Cr. Rs. 1650 which was increased to Cr. Rs. 2007 in 1744, to Cr. Rs. 2285 in 1748, and to Cr. Rs. 3500 in 1752. In 1738, the collections under the second head was recorded as Cr. Rs. 1101, which was increased to Cr. Rs. 1200 in 1744, to Cr. Rs. 1345 in 1748, and then to Cr. Rs. 2100 in 1752. "The third partition . . ., is the Jouldary, or Weighman's duty, of 1 Seer 4 Chittacks. per Rupee, levied on all Rice, Paddy, Gram, Wheat, &c. Grain imported in the Great Bazar." The collections under this particular head was Cr. Rs. 726, in 1738, Cr. Rs. 1036 in 1744, Cr. Rs. 1180 in 1748, and Cr. Rs. 1900 in 1752.

were subjected to another duty in the "Great Bazar". That was called "Jouldary, or Weighman's duty 1 Seer 4 Chittacks per Rupee" and it was imposed on all types of grains imported in the said bazar. This is another instance where the Company raised the fund from the public to meet the establishment cost of some particular departments. In any case the collections in the "Great Bazar" in terms of revenue had marked a steady progress since 1738.<sup>66</sup> If Holwell is to be believed then Calcutta had by then got the momentum towards growth.

Too many duties made the people unhappy. But the Company could not become philanthropist overnight. It always needed 'native' servants for its own business as well as for its officials' domestic use. Hence a high cost of living would lead menials to clamour for high wages which could not be provided easily. This was understood by the administration and it was agreed even in November 1755, that to relieve the poors no duty should be levied on rice, oil, vegetables, fish etc.<sup>67</sup> But that was simply a paper decision. Again in December 1758, the Company's administration resolved to relieve the poor in all articles of common consumption whenever the duty collected on them "appears a grievance."<sup>68</sup> So one finds the Grand Jury of the town denouncing several duties which were then prevalent in Calcutta. "the collection of duties on all provisions and necessities of life brought into Calcutta by land, whereby the prices of every articles of substance was enhanced to a most exorbitant degree, and the hardship was most severe on the lowest class of people."<sup>69</sup>

The dilemma on the part of the rulers was due to the fact that the duties on goods could fetch a good amount of revenue from the town. The Company's need of finance was great and it always tried to maximize the revenue. But indiscriminate enhancement had the risk of spoiling the entire system.

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66. *Ibid.*

67. *Home (Public) Progs.* 2.11.1755.

68. *Selections.* No. 386.

69. *Selections.* No. 473.



Hence, it tried to impose roughly a uniform duty structure on the goods of daily necessity. On 31st March 1763, Mr. Peter Amyatt, the Collector of Calcutta, issued an official declaration for collection of duties in the bazars of the town.<sup>70</sup> But his arrangement had not covered all the items usually transacted in the bazars. From a detailed list of duties prevalent in some principal bazars in the town in the month of July 1786, a complete picture could be drawn. The duties were imposed on 102 types of articles. In the majority of cases, the same article was further subdivided according to size or weight and subjected to duties.<sup>71</sup> These duties were usually called *tolah*. Initially these *tolahs* had been collected in kind. But later those were converted into cash. In a letter dated, 7th April 1785, the Collector of Calcutta maintained that the "Rate of this... has never been fixed by Government, it has always been settled by mutual Agreement between the Bazar Farmer and Reiat."<sup>72</sup> This very assertion clearly proves the helplessness of the government in framing a uniform duty structure in Calcutta. But from another angle it may be said that this was deliberately done by the government to attract investments in the bazars of the town. The *tolah* was not a rent and for this the scope of negotiated arrangement was wide. Most probably this was the prime reason of competition and also conflict among the richmen in Calcutta for farming or owning the bazars during this period.

The duties were divided into seven catagories. Principal among those were a daily market duty on goods sold in the bazars, an import duty on boats independent of market duty, an annual duty on godowns or warehouses of certain articles, an annual duty on *tols* or sheds in market places, a monthly duty on shops.<sup>73</sup> Others were not specifically mentioned.

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70. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 6.11.1778.

71. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. Appendix to the month of July 1786.

72. C. O. R. Progs. 11.4.1785.

73. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 29.4.1788.

The rent for a place in the bazars was called, *tehbazaree*. *Tolah* and *tehbazaree* were the two basic charges which had to be paid by a vendor in the bazar.<sup>74</sup> In 1763, Mr. Amyatt had fixed the rate of *tehbazaree* at 12 *gonda 2 cowri* for a shop for a day. This amount also included 2 *gonda 2 cowri* which was a customary donation or *birt* (britti) to the Hindu Brahmins. Unless a vendor remitted this amount he was not allowed to vend his goods.

Besides the rent and the *tolah* the vendors had to pay a duty called "Shop Salamy". This was charged on those shops which were on the Company's ground. It is difficult to derive whether the private bazar-owners also charged this "Shop Salamy" or not. In the face of an agitation by the stall-holders in Bytoconnah Bazar against this sort of levy,\* the Collector observed that it was an authorised charge under the name of "Toll Salamy or Compensation for Sheds in the Book of Rates." This "Toll Salamy" as stated in the "Book of Rates" was Rs. 2 and 4 annas per shop per annum. This rate "is understood to be on a piece of Ground 3 P.Cubits square and that any Individual Vendor occupying 7 or 10 P.Cubits is charged double and Treble Toll."<sup>75</sup>

Though there was no instance of agitation by the duty payers except that one in Bytoconnah the vendors were not altogether happy. The Company always insisted on the vendors remitting their dues first. The Committee of Revenue once observed that as the owners of the land for private bazars had already been paying rent for their respective holdings, any further duty on the shops erected on those lands would be resented by such owners. But the Company was not ready to leave them. So it was decided to impose bazar imposts on shops situated in private bazars.<sup>76</sup> The assessments were conducted on the basis of some agreed arrangements. The landholders were very much

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\* That was the sole opposition of its kind during the entire period of our study.

74. C. O. R. Progs. 11.4.1785.

75. B. O. R. (Sayer) Progs. 21.2.1791.

76. C. O. R. Progs. 5.9.1781.

dissatisfied. The bazars were chiefly owned by the rich as well as influential Indians occasionally in collaboration with some Europeans. Resentment among these men was a cause of worry to the Company. The matter was ultimately settled at the highest level of administration. On 21st September 1781, the Governor General in Council in a letter to the Committee of Revenue directed "that Goods exposed to sale in Dokauns or shops the Property of Individuals be not made subject to the Payment of Duties in like manner as when the same Articles were exposed to sale in the Streets or on the Company's Ground, but that the Bazar Imposts be levied from the public Bazars or from the Stalls and shops situated on the Company's Ground, as usual."<sup>77</sup> Probably the government did not want to assess twice a particular plot of land where bazars were held. But this direction was utilised by the land-owners in different manners. Because of the operation of the "Bye Laws" the straw huts and shops from the town proper had to be removed. Now the shop owners refused to pay any duty as they had already established new shops on the lands owned either by themselves or by other individuals. Their defence was that when they had their shops on the streets they used to remit the official dues. But now they opened their shops on their own land for which they had already been paying rents.<sup>78</sup> This created a lot of problems. The shop-owners in the bazars were aggrieved as they had to pay usual bazar duties along with the *tehbazaree* while the individual shop-owners refused to pay such duties. This problem could not be solved easily.

The government's eagerness in raising funds encouraged in maintaining monopoly rights on the sale of some articles. Though in official records monopolies were prohibited<sup>79</sup> they were in existence in the bazars. The monopoly rights on certain articles some of which were of common consumption meant

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77. C. O. R. Progs. 1.10.1781.

78. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 29.4.1788.

79. C. O. R. Progs. 3.10.1782.

the price and supply of them depended solely on the whims of the holders of such rights. Nobody could sell betel, betel-nut, indigo which was then popularly called, "blue vitriol", glass *ganja*, and *bhang*,— types of intoxicant without the permission of the bazar-farmer or owner, whatever the case might be. The process of such sale was called, *kutkina* system.<sup>80</sup> The sellers were known as the *kutkinadars*. It is very difficult to ascertain how much of the amount received in this process exactly reached the official coffer. This was due to the lack of control over the retailers in the bazars. Most probably the collections by the farmers of those monopolies were often not satisfactory. The underhand transactions and evasion of duties by the retailers were always there. Once the farmer of glass, "Red lead", indigo and fireworks refused to farm items for the year 1789-90. The Collector estimated the total possible collections might be *sicca* Rupees 500 for which the collection charge would amount to Rs. 144. Hence there was no way left but to collect them in *khas* or directly by the Collector himself.<sup>81</sup>

The government could realise the problem of monopolies. Neither the government reached the target of collections nor were the people happy. So it decided to liberalise the restrictions selectively. The betel and betel-nuts were of common consumption. The *kutkina* system on those two articles were withdrawn by an order dated, 30th October 1782.<sup>82</sup> Now anybody could vend those for the payment of 3 *pun* 10 *gonda* daily.<sup>83</sup> For vending glass the vendors had to pay a duty of 4 per cent on the price of the goods.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, the restriction on the sale of *ganja* was also withdrawn in May, 1788.<sup>85</sup> But it did not mean

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80. C. O. R. Progs. 11.4.1785.

81. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 17.2.1789.

82. C. O. R. Progs. 7.2.1785.

83. *Ibid.*

84. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 17.2.1789.

85. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 22.6.1789.

that any body could sell that article anywhere in the town. First, the Company had imposed a 4 per cent custom duty on the import of *ganja* into Calcutta. The vendors had to pay a *jumma* ranging from 1 rupee 12 annas to 60 rupees per month per shop.<sup>86</sup> It is difficult to define the actual reason for such a wide difference of *jumma* amount for shops. One conclusion may be that the quantity of sale of *ganja* from shop to shop varied.

Another important source of the government's incomes was liquor, mostly made of indigenous ingredients. That was commonly known as "arrack". Till the year of 1760, there had not been any restriction for the vending of "arrack". But the "arrack" shops had increasingly become the source of a large number of crimes. It was commonly believed that after getting drunk the people indulged in criminal activities. Moreover, the sailors of the ships which used to anchor in the port, were regularly involved in innumerable strifes by drinking "arrack". The possibility of bootlegging also could not be avoided. So to deal with law and order problem and also to regularise the sale of "arrack", the Company in 1760, formed a committee with Smith and Verelst.<sup>87</sup> This committee recommended the grant of licence to the vendors in and around Calcutta and, also suitable punishments for illegal vending.<sup>88</sup> The Company then used to farm out the sole selling rights of "arrack" to a particular person for a year. During the major part between the 1770s and 1780s one Mr. Lavel undertook the farm of the said right. For this, he was to pay Rs. 10,000 to the government every year.<sup>89</sup> No one except the retailers under him could sell "arrack". But there was no machinery to stop the sale of "spirituous liquors" in Calcutta. From this the nature of the inhabitants becomes somehow clear. A town in its formative phase was full of

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86. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 30.12.1788.

87. Selections. No. 469.

88. Selections. No. 859.

89. Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs. 30.8.1776.

people subjected to the habit of drinking. And this was certainly not a sign of a healthy society. The government had a little concern about it. It was interested only in collecting its dues and illegal vending robbed it of its wealth. Since 1760 a lot of words had been spent to frame regulations and to stop the evil but, actually nothing concrete was done to that direction. "Arrack shops had become so numerous and licentious that they were grown into perfect nuisance"; the government once thought it high time to put a stop to such a destructive evil by placing the shops under proper control and regulation."<sup>90</sup>

The eagerness of the government to raise revenues and the consequence of this made the matter complicated. Often administrative requirements guided towards little betterment. In a letter dated, 4th April 1787, the Collector recommended to the Board of Revenue the abolition of certain petty duties and, particularly the *tolahs*.<sup>91</sup> But how it could do it? Its hands were tied as regards *tolahs* in the bazars. These solely belonged to the bazar-farmers. Moreover, the Collector also concluded that all the benefits of various duties were appropriated by the 'native' officials. Hence his eagerness to abolish these became clear. But the Collector failed to do it. In fact, the Company could not shed its responsibility for the imposition of a lot of duties on various commodities. It had never tried to rationalise them for the benefit of common consumers.

It was because of the policies of the Company itself that the duties were raised in Calcutta. The vendors in the bazars had to pay a fixed amount of 2 *gonda* 2 *cowri* per day as the *birt* i.e. amount meant for certain religious purposes or for

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90. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 9. Letter to the Court dated, 7.12.1782, para 35. But bootlegging could not be stopped, was evident from another letter written by same to same and dated, 27.4.1792. para 75. Here it was mentioned that "the Sale of Spiritous and fermented Liquors and intoxicating Drugs, by Retail, in the Town of Calcutta, except in licensed Inns and Taverns, should be prohibited." *F. W. I. H.* vol. 11.

91. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 11.5.1787.

the livelihood of the Hindu Brahmins.<sup>92</sup> Interestingly enough the *birt* was solely meant for the Hindu Brahmins but, was collected from Hindus and Muslims alike. It is difficult to ascertain the date from when this practice had started. But there is at least one information that in 1752-53, Holwell had allowed a Brahmin to collect daily *birt* as his land was occupied by the Company. If *birt* was a compensation for any loss incurred by a Brahmin then, it is clear that the Company's government simply passed its own financial liabilities on the shoulders of the people of the town. This shifting of fiscal responsibility was not uncommon in a context where the government seemed to be labouring under heavy financial stringency, here or anywhere and at any time in history.

The commodities brought into Calcutta were subjected to another duty of special kind. Initially there was a road-duty imposed on the goods brought into Calcutta. The Company was not satisfied with this system. Most probably collections did not match expectations. By an order dated, 14th April, 1773, the Board of Customs had prohibited the collection of road-duties.<sup>93</sup> But this did not mean that no duty was charged on the goods carried into Calcutta. Even a duty was charged on all "Merchandize carried out of Calcutta."<sup>94</sup> The Company kept

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92. *B. O. R. Land Rev. & Misc. Progs.* 16.6.1786. The *Birt* was divided among the under-mentioned persons in the following proportion
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|---|----------------|--|
| 1 | cowri daily to | Ram Kanta Tarkalanker  |
| 1 | " "            | " " Radhakanta Tarkalanker   |
| 1 | " "            | " " Jeban Das Bairagi  |
| 1 | " "            | " " Lal Dass   |
| 1 | " "            | " " Nemai Charan Dass  |
| 1 | " "            | " " Bala Ram Adhikari  |
| 1 | " "            | " " Jagannath Zunnardar(?), whose duty was to supervise the "washing and burning deceased Hindoos" |
| 1 | " "            | " " Raja Nabakrishna ("in consequence of his Having bought up the Share of Bardo Bremchary.")      |
| 2 | " "            | " " divided among about 180 poor Brahmins.   |

93. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 4.10.1776.

94. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 16.1.1782.

a strict vigil on the roads leading to the town<sup>95</sup> to prevent any types of smuggling. Ultimately, it was decided to abolish the road duties and that "a duty of two and a half per cent on all Goods imported or exported be Substituted in its stead."<sup>96</sup>

The amounts collected from the bazars were never spent for their improvements. During the entire period of second half of eighteenth century only Bytoconnah bazar was rebuilt by the Company. Moreover the imposition of *chowkedarry* tax increased that burden. In the face of all these, it is very difficult to conclude that there had been any time in Calcutta a free movement of goods. Piracy and smuggling were additional hindrance and banditry was rampant. Unhindered distribution of commodities was a goal yet unrealized.

#### 6. *Peddling patronised.*

There was a glaring contradiction in the policy of the Company's government. It did not issue permission to open bazars but it allowed the hawkers to roam in the streets and to encroach on them. In 1781, "By the Regulations established for the Police of Calcutta by the late Ordinance the people are excluded from exposing any thing for sale in the streets and the Bazars have in consequence been removed from them." It was also observed that the fall in revenue due to such policy was imminent.<sup>97</sup> But it was also a declared policy of the Company's government that "the Receipts on account of Bazar Duties, enable Government to defray the expense of keeping the Bazars clean."<sup>98</sup> In spite of this, not a single bazar of the Company was kept clean nor any additions were made in their number. With the growth of the town the number of residents also increased. If no adequate provision was made for them to purchase their daily necessities, the only way left was to collect those from the peddlers.

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95. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 27.6.1788.

96. F. W. I. H. vol. 12. Letter from the Court dated, 9.3.1794, para 17.

97. C. O. R. Progs. 5.9.1781.

98. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 30.12.1788.



In Calcutta during its early colonial days, the government's apathy for providing the necessary civic service to its residents was the sole cause of the existence of the peddlers. Any person might vend his goods on the streets of the town by paying 7 annas 13 *cowri* in any of the public bazars per day.<sup>99</sup> No permit was issued from any bazar. Gradually the number of peddlers increased day by day resulting into the increase of street-nuisance. The Commissioners of Police first raised their voice against this. The peddlers generally encroached the streets and the way-side drains. In their letter to the Governor General in Council dated, 3rd August 1791, the Commissioners observed: "It is unnecessary to observe, that the planks and Boards laid over the Drains, on which a great variety of Articles are exposed for Sale must necessarily create much filth and Dirt and occasion the Stoppage of the Drains and that Crowds of people vending their goods upon the public Roads not only obstruct the Passangers but... must be prejudicial to the Collections in the Bazars." The problem was clear to them. They had to deal with the law and order problem which was aggravated by the unbridled movement of the peddlers. So they had no alternative but to remove the peddlers forever. But the Collector was not ready to accept their ideas. His contention was that, "The walking Vendors pay the usual Tehbazarry (*sic*) to any one Bazar they may Choose (*sic*). From that Bazar they Receive a Docket certifying that the Tehbazarry (*sic*) of that day has been paid and they have free progress thro' the limits of every other Bazar". Hence the apprehension of loss of revenue was baseless. To counter the complaint of civic nuisance, the Collector also observed that, "The number of such Vendors which fill the Streets of London have I believe never been complained of except as a nuisance to delicate ears."<sup>100</sup> All were very tangible arguments on the part of colonial ruler. He did not fail to mention that the planks on the drains on which the peddlers often sat to sell their goods, were all temporary and when the

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99. R. B. W. C. Progs. 29.10.1773.

100. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 24.8.1791.

drains required cleaning all of them were lifted. Hence the practice could not be changed as it yielded regular revenue to the Company. In this way peddling was allowed to sustain and eventually it became a part of Calcutta's life.

## PART II

### Police Administration

#### 7. *Security system*

From the very beginning of its existence in Calcutta, the Company had tried to raise a police force however rudimentary that might be. It was seriously needed to guard the trade of the Company. Moreover, as a *zamindar* of the place it was one of its functions to give protections to the inhabitants. Most probably, the Company was aware of the fact that to ensure a regular flow of revenue the protection of life and property of the individuals was essential. Feeling of insecurity among the people was a serious impediment towards urban settlement. And that was appreciated by the Company even in the earliest decade of the eighteenth century.<sup>101</sup> It had been increasingly felt within the Company's quarters that, if Calcutta were to be made populous a proper police and judicial system could not be ignored for long.

After the battle of Palasi, the Directors of the Company could not remain apathetic towards the needs of this place. Calcutta then needed a proper administration, police as well as judicial. In 1758, upon the recommendations of Holwell, the Company separated the civil and criminal functions of the *zamindar's* office. Till then Calcutta was under a *kotwal* who

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101. C. R. Wilson, *The Early Annals* . . . vol. I. Nos. 52, 188.

with his men constituted the police force of the town. But the post of *kotwal* was abolished and, upon the order of the Directors dated 3rd March 1758, an European guard was appointed for night patrol in the town.<sup>102</sup> This was the beginning of a regular police administration in a colonial framework in Calcutta. But the situation of the town did not improve "because of the inadequacy of the police and municipal arrangements to meet the problems created by the growing population."<sup>103</sup> Like other departments here too the Company was never ready to spend from its coffer.

But the police administration could never be amateurish. The need of a regular police force was realised by Warren Hastings. In 1772, Hastings found Calcutta virtually without any protection. He decided to raise a force without adding much to the Company's financial burden.<sup>104</sup> On 24th November 1772, the Council at the Fort William resolved that "The Town of Calcutta having been of late greatly infested in the Night time with Robbers..., it is to be apprehended the encrease of its Inhabitants will cause this Evil to grow to a much greater and dangerous Excess, unless prevented by timely and effectual Regulations." The basic problem of Hastings in constituting a regular police force was once again finance. He was fully aware of it. Hence, "he consulted with some of the Principal Inhabitants, and from the Encouragement which they have given him to believe that the Inhabitants in general will Cheerfully (*sic*) submit to the Charge of a well Appointed Police."<sup>105</sup> It was decided to divide the entire town into certain divisions which were to be placed under as many as thirty three *thanadars* or officers-in-charge of police-stations, thirty three *naibs* or assistants, and seven hundred *pykes* or Indian constables. As the entire system

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102. *Selections*. No. 306.

103. B. B. Misra. *The Judicial Administration of the East India Company in Bengal, 1765-1782*. (Delhi, 1961). p. 339.

104. *Ibid.* pp. 339-40

105. R. B. W. C. *Progs.* typed vol. 29.6.1773.

required a running fund Hastings innovated unique plan. "That these shall be all under the Control (*sic*) and Authority of the Most Substantial House-holder of the Division, or Such Person as shall be generally approved of by the other Inhabitants ....., and defray" all charges. For this such person was authorised to levy tax in his area. The entire police force was under an European Superintendent.<sup>106</sup> A boundary of the town was also drawn. The river formed that boundary on the west, the Maratha Ditch on the north, the same till Etally village of the 15 *Dihis* on the east and, a straight line from there to the burying ground on the Chowringhee on the south.<sup>107</sup> But the magistrates were not satisfied for the inadequate number of personnels. They demanded more European 'constables' and were ultimately allowed to employ six such 'constables' in November 1773.<sup>108</sup> So Calcutta had a complex system of police arrangement. The *sezawalls* and *buzaries* were for guarding the boundaries of the town including the river and another regular police-force under an European superintendent.

Yet the law and order situation in the town was never up to the expectations. It was widely believed that the seamen of various nations as well as the domestic servants were the main mischief-makers in the town. To check this menace, an office was opened to register the names of various servants—*sarengs*, *tindals* and *lascars* of the ships.<sup>109</sup> The seamen were viewed as the principal perpetrators of innumerable crimes committed during the night. The Portuguese seamen were not allowed to enter the town before seven in the morning and, they were to leave by five

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106. *Ibid.*

107. *Home (Public) Progs.* 16.11.1787. But *R. B. W. C. Progs.* typed vol. 19.4.1774 records Bidyadhari river on the east, Curry Jurry on the south and Putta village on the north as boundaries.

108. *R. B. W. C. Progs.* typed vol. 2.11.1773.

109. *R. B. W. C. Progs.* 17.5.1774.

in the evening.<sup>110</sup> Still the police failed to prevent their entry during the night.<sup>111</sup> Often those seamen were closely followed by other Europeans in disguise. The principal hunting ground of the Europeans was Chowringhee.<sup>112</sup> It was complained that even the soldiers who had their camps at the Esplanade and Chowringhee used to rob the pedestrians in nearby areas.<sup>113</sup>

It was believed by some in the official quarters that the consumption of "arrack" or liquor generally led to innumerable troubles within Calcutta. So it was decided to keep the sale of that article within certain limits. The Company was not ready to prohibit its sale altogether as "arrack" fetched a good amount of revenue. No shop was allowed to sell "arrack" after the sunset. But it was too difficult to impose this rule strictly. Moreover, there was a good number of "prohibited Pariar Arrack" shops.<sup>114</sup> The Government farmed out the right to sell "arrack" to a particular person who was asked to issue licence to shops as retail outlets not exceeding thirty in number within the Maratha Ditch and Kidderpur.<sup>115</sup> Though in 1773, there were only twenty-eight such shops,<sup>116</sup> it is not possible to say that there were no illegal shop even in that year. The government could forego anything for money during those days. Time and again the government singled out the consumption of "arrack" as the sole cause for the breakdown of

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- 110. W. S. Seton-Karr, *Selections from Calcutta Gazettes ... etc.* (Calcutta 1864) vol. I. p. 1. Official Notice of 11th March 1784.
  - 111. *Ibid.* pp. 241-42. Official Notice of 27th November 1788.
  - 112. *Ibid.* vol. II. pp. 146-47. Official Notice of 16th April 1795. *Home (Public) Progs.* 4.2.1791 and 24.2.1792.
  - 113. *Ibid.* vol. II. p. 54. Official Advertisement of 3rd November 1791 and p. 325, Editorial of 1st March 1792.
  - 114. *R. B. W. C. Progs.* typed vol. 22.6.1773.
  - 115. *Ibid.*
  - 116. *R. B. W. C. Progs.* typed vol. 29.6.1773.

peace in Calcutta. Still it issued permission for the sale of that article. In 1773, it decided to issue licence to another thirty shops within the town and Kidderpur and the number multiplied in subsequent period. In 1790, the total number of licenced shops within the town was 286. The alarming feature was that even it was believed by the officials themselves that nearly 100 of such shops kept by the 'natives' used to sell bad liquor.<sup>117</sup>

In any case the basic problem relating to the security arrangement in Calcutta was generated within the system itself. For the lack of money the Company's hands were tied. Though a police tax was imposed the yield was not such as could match the expenditure. Within a year of Hastings' arrangements in 1773, the Company decided to reduce the number of the *pykes* or traditional Indian constables though it knew well that rate of crime would increase for such reduction.<sup>118</sup> The Company's plan was to raise "arrack" duties to defray the police cost.<sup>119</sup> To the officials, police meant certainly a bunch of European police.

Since the police authority was empowered to transact certain judicial works "the Superintendents had been unable to resist the temptation of exorting money from sui-

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117. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 17.5.1790.

118. *The Superintendent of Khalsa Progs.* vol. II, 19.10.1773.

119. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 12, Letter to the Court dated, 13.2.1794, para, 5. It was a declared policy of the Company to utilise the money collected as duties from the sale of "arrack" in police management. It was stated that to check, "as far as possible, the abuses arising from the Number of Shops in which Spirituous Liquors are vended in Calcutta, and to impose a heavy Duty on the Licences to be granted for the Sale of them, the said duty being to be received by Government, in part Reimbursement of the Police Charges for the Town."

tors to compensate for a very inadequate salary.”<sup>120</sup> The matter was such that the *thanadars* were believed to be the brains behind a large number of thefts and robberies. To prevent these, a committee appointed for the betterment of police recommended that the *thanadars* “should be compelled to sign an agreement making them answerable for losses sustained by the inhabitants at the hands of thieves, if they failed to arrest the offenders.” It was also recommended that the salaries of the entire police force should be enhanced.<sup>121</sup>

Yet nothing was done to make the police administration perfect. It was even accepted by the Governor General-in-Council that the police regulations were much better in Chandannagore, Chinsura and Srirampur than those in Calcutta. To lessen the burden of the Superintendent the post of a joint Superintendent was created in 1785.<sup>122</sup> Lord Cornwallis thought seriously of a better police arrangement in Calcutta. The 36th clause of the Regulating Act had empowered the Governor General-in-Council to make laws for good government. Cornwallis drew an extensive plan and termed it the “Police Bill.” The implementation of the entire system involved resources. “Because the Police Bill sent home in 1788 had been temporarily shelved, Cornwallis decided that the thoroughly unsatisfactory state of the Calcutta Police necessitated immediate action, and on 12 and 14 October 1791 Regulations of a provisional nature for the reorganization of the police.... were passed.”<sup>123</sup> Among the large number of proposed reforms the most important was the rise of the pay of the *thanadars* and *pykes*. Only Cornwallis could realise the fact that unless the police was paid adequate salary no work could be expected of them.

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120. A. Aspinall, *Cornwallis in Bengal*, (Manchester, 1931) p. 123.

121. *Ibid.* p. 104.

122. *Home (Public) Progs.* 21.3.1785.

123. A. Aspinall, *op. cit.* p. 104.

Moreover, he had faced resentment among the police force for the meagre sums of money which they received occasionally.<sup>124</sup>

Cornwallis revived the *scawalls* and *buxaries* in face of some complaints by the residents.<sup>125</sup> They were again posted in different places of the town.<sup>126</sup> The river *ghats* were also guarded by them.<sup>127</sup> Two armed-boats were deployed on the river to prevent unauthorised entries.<sup>128</sup> But the rules were not adequate. To intercept the "Fugitives from Foreign Ships resident in Calcutta" and to correct "the present defects in the Police" the Company was to decide upon new rules even in 1792.<sup>129</sup>

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124. *Home (Public) Progs.* 9.6.1790 and 28.10.1791.

125. *Home (Public) Progs.* 3.4.1786, Since the *Buxaries* were abolished in March 1786, many inhabitants "murmur at the Dismission ..., having always considered, that they were paid by a Tax raised for that special purpose."

126. *Home (Public) Progs.* 2.10.1789. In his letter dated 30th September 1789, the Superintendent of Police informed the Secretary of the Government that there were already sepoy guards.

one at the west end of the Dharmatala Road  
 one at the east end of the Dharmatala Road  
 one at the Bread and Cheese Bungalow.  
 one in the Lal Bazar.  
 one near the Fouzdar of Hughli's House.

It was proposed to strengthen the 2nd and 3rd, to add  
 one in Muchwabazar.  
 one at Puttarea Gaut the north of the Nabob's House,  
 one where the four roads meet at Manicktala,  
 one at the broadest part of Dingabangha, and  
 one near the Madrassah.

127. *Home (Public) Progs.* 5.2.1790.

128. *Home (Public) Progs.* 20.12.1790.

129. *F. W. I. II.* vol. 11. Letter from the Court dated 8.2.1792, para-52.

The Superintendent of Police in August 1792, sought permi-



Though Cornwallis endeavoured a lot for the improvements of the police administration of Calcutta he could achieve little. The principal reason behind such failures was inadequacy of fund and absence of will power. The Company initiated a police tax payable by all property-owners including the vendors in the bazars. Yet the Company failed to pay adequately to the police force. Most probably the 'native' recruits had to suffer most for inadequate salaries. One of the reasons for the abolition of *sezawalls* etc. was the regular complaints against them for extortion of money. When Cornwallis re-introduced them the same complaints began to pour in the office of the Collector.<sup>130</sup> All the programmes of both Hastings and Cornwallis remained somewhat unimplemented. To protect themselves often rich 'natives' employed private retainers which were ultimately disbanded as a result of directives from the government.<sup>131</sup>

#### 8. *The Chowkedarry Tax.*

While initiating new police establishment, the Company imposed a new tax namely, the *chowkedarry* tax. This tax, more or less, affected the entire population of the town directly or indirectly. It was a police tax meant for the fund to defray the cost of the police force. The police tax was nothing new in this country. Previously, there had been *kotwali* which was a tax collected from the residents of a particular area to defray the police cost. The police was needed for the maintenance of law and order. In Calcutta, the existence of *kotwali* can be traced even prior to the year 1757 and along with *metrifeh* and *hissabna* it for-

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ssion to prevent the entries of the vagrants into the town. This meant that he had no adequate authority to deal with the same. *Home (Public) Progs.* 6.8.1792.

130. *Home (Public) Progs.* 23.6.1790.

131. *Home (Public) Progs.* 3.4.1786 and *B. O. R. at Fort William Progs.* 16.6.1786.

med a unique trio. Why was then *chowkedarry* tax necessary ?

The imposition of the *chowkedarry* tax in Calcutta was a part of Hastings' plan for police administration in 1773. Though the said programme was criticised by no less a person than the Roy Royan himself, *chowkedarry* was ultimately introduced in 1773.<sup>132</sup> Hastings clearly spelt out his motives. The police was meant to provide protections to the residents of the town and to act as safeguard to their private properties. But interestingly enough, initially the said tax was imposed only on the properties in the town proper and in a limited way in Kidderpur. And that was in force till 23rd April 1794.<sup>133</sup> As the police establishment lacked its fund it was proposed by the Commissioner of the police in a later date to tax all the houses within the Maratha Ditch and in Chowringhee because the residents there used to enjoy equal protection from the government.<sup>134</sup>

The rate of *chowkedarry* was not uniform throughout the town. It was divided into two categories. The holdings on the western side of Chitpur Road from north to south up to Chowringhee was charged at the rate of Rs. 5 per *bigha* per annum. And those on the eastern side of the said road was charged at the rate of only Rs. 4 per *bigha* per annum.<sup>135</sup> Probably the rates varied on the considerations of the value as well as importance of properties. The western side of Chitpur Road was nearer the river. That locality also included the biggest trading place of the town, Bara Bazar, a part of Lal Bazar, old fort and Jora Bagan—the seat of the Setts, the famous merchant family of the time. Most probably all these factors contributed to the higher valuations of land on that side of the road.

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132. *C. O. R. Progs.* 3.9.1781.

133. *B.O. R. Misc. Progs.* 27.5.1794.

134. *Home (Public) Progs.* 28.2.1787.

135. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 29.4.1788.

In 1788, a total amount of Rs. 29,757-15-9-0 was received from the town proper as *chowkedarry*.<sup>136</sup> A total amount of 1726 *bigha* 10 *cottah* and 14½ *chittak* was charged at the rate of Rs. 5 per annum per *bigha* and, 5281 *bigha* 2 *cottah* and 14 *chittak* at the rate of Rs. 4. Hence a total amount of 7007 *bigha* 13 *cottah* and 12½ *chittak* of land was brought under its perview. But during the same period ground rent was charged from a total of 7644 *bigha* 16 *cottah* and 4½ *chittak* of land. This proves that *chowkedarry* was not charged on the entire town. In the very first year of its existence, the tax was charged on a lesser amount of land. On the western side of Chitpar Road the tax was charged on 1604 *bigha* 4 *cottah* and 1 *chittak* land amounting to Rs. 8031-0-0. On the eastern side only 4976 *bigha* 11 *cottah* and 3 *chittak* land was charged with this *chowkedarry* which produced Rs. 19906-3-9.<sup>137</sup>

Hastings wanted to involve the rich Indians in policing some localities and to pass on them the entire expenditure needed for the same. However, that arrangement did not prove effective. Hastings abandoned the plan.<sup>138</sup> Henceforth the *chowkedarry* was included within the bills for ground rent to facilitate uninterrupted collections.

Hastings had his eyes also on the vendors in the bazars as prospective payers of tax. Prior to the implementation of Hastings' plan, there was a tax in the nature of road-tax in the town. Interestingly, that was only levied on "eatables" and not "upon more valuable goods." In 1772-73 the collections from that source amounted to Rs. 7030 while Rs. 2976 was received on account of the existing bazar-duties. On 29th June, 1773 it was decided to raise the sum

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136. *Ibid.*

137. *R. B. W. C. Progs.* 29.6.1773. Calculations as given here are not perfect.

138. *Home (Public) Progs.* 6.8.1792.

of Rs. 6200 for the expence of the proposed police establishment by levying a tax of 7 annas per day upon those vendors who used to vend their goods on the streets in addition to the existing bazar duty of 13 *cowri*. But the Roy Royan opposed this scheme on the apprehension that it might irritate the common people. Finally his proposal for a composite daily duty of 27 *cowri* or 6 *gonda* 3 *cowri* was approved.<sup>139</sup>

Though the Company made a relentless endeavour to raise the *chowkedarry* tax, the collections under this head

Year	Jumma (Assessment)	Waseel (Collection)	Bakee (Due)
1773— 4	Rs. 33,653- 7-13-0	Rs. 28,380- 9- 8-0	Rs. 5,272-14- 5-0
1774— 5	34,245-13- 4-0	31,290-11- 6-0	2,955- 1-18-0
1775— 6	34,445- 3- 4-0	31,447- 1- 3-0	2,998- 1- 8-0
1776— 7	36,544-12- 7-0	30,135-10-19-0	6,409- 1- 8-0
1777— 8	36,455- 3- 1-0	26,928- 0- 9-0	9,527- 2-12-0
1778— 9	36,536- 3- 1-0	33,055- 5-11-0	3,480-12-10-0
1779—80	36,625- 8- 2-0	33,477- 7-17-0	3,148- 0- 5-0
1780—81	36,635-10- 6-0	33,298- 7-16-0	3,337- 2-10-0
1781— 2	35,299- 1-12-12	33,031- 4- 2-0	2,267-13-10-0
1782— 3	34,804- 0- 7-0	32,650-10- 9-0	2,154- 5-18-0
1783— 4	34,134- 9- 6-0	32,130-10- 1-0	2,003-15- 5-0
1784— 5	33,189- 5-17-0	32,670- 6-14-0	818-15- 3-0
1785— 6	34,510- 2-12-0	33,818-19- 7-0	691- 8- 5-0
1786— 7	34,892-12-15-0	34,473- 2- 2-0	419-10- 3-0
1787— 8	34,927- 9-14-0	34,402- 8-14-0	525- 1- 0-0

139. R. B. W. C. Progs. 29.10.1773.

since its imposition in 1773 till 30th July 1788 remained somewhat static. The table above<sup>140</sup> gives the idea of the movement of this tax between 1773 and 1788.

From the above table, it is clear that the collections at the outset did not reach their targets. With the passing of time the agitation and oppositions against the imposition of the *chowkedarry* tax had died down. Cornwallis arrived here and the collections were pushed up. But the assessment or the *jumma* during long fifteen years remained roughly same. This indicated a saturation.

#### 9. *Opposition to Chowkedarry Tax.*

The resentment of the inhabitants against the imposition of *chowkedarry* tax vindicate their unhappiness over the administration. Even the Indian officials under the Company shared the sentiment. The Roy Royan himself opposed the proposal for such impositions on the vendors in the bazars.

The imposition of the *chowkedarry* tax was opposed particularly by the rich Indians and the Europeans. The Company failed to bring them into book as all of them had influential connections in the administration. Initially, the demand for *chowkedarry* was included in the same bill for ground rent. Hence the opposition to the payment of *chowkedarry* meant the accumulation in ground rent. According to the existing practice the failure to remit ground rent might cause the loss of possession of that property for which the bill had been issued. If the residents refused to remit the ground rent in large numbers the problem of the Company was bound to multiply.<sup>141</sup>

Baranoshi Ghosh, a rich banian and the farmer of

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140. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 24.12.1788.

141. Cal C. O. R. Progs. 19.6.177.

Bara Bazar for sometime and Maharaja Nabakrishna were the leading figures among the Indians who opposed the imposition of the *chowkedarry* tax.<sup>142</sup> Nabakrishna's contentions were that when the Company had granted him Sutanuti for perpetuity on a fixed annual *jumma*, the Company ceased to possess any right in respect of that *taluk*. But he had to succumb in the face of severe threat from the Company's government in 1789.<sup>143</sup> Nabakrishna had his own problem too. The *ryots* in Sutanuti refused to pay *chowkedarry* tax unless that was included in the same bill for ground rent.<sup>144</sup> The *talukdar* was entitled to the ground rent and the Company's government to the *chowkedarry* tax. If the possession of a property was related to the payment of both the dues then it was expected by the *ryots* that both should be remitted in a single bill. That would avoid any plea of ignorance by any of the two collectors. After vigorous departmental exercise Nabakrishna was forced to abide by the official rules.

Often the *chowkedarry* tax was also termed as "house tax". For that a regular assessment of houses were conducted.<sup>145</sup> As the tax was related to property, the officials of the government were apprehending danger. The Superintendent of Police also thought that without the concurrence of the Supreme Court, the Police regulations could

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142. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 26.12.1778.

143. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 13.7.1789.

The reluctance of Nabakrishna to pay the *chowkedarry* tax for Sutanuti was such that in 1780, the balance accumulated to Rs. 10,102-8-6-0. The Governor General-in-Council in its meeting of 1st August 1780, decided to employ the Company's officials to collect the same as the Maharaja had pleaded that he did not have sufficient authority to collect the same. *C. O. R. Progs.* vol. 10; Appendix to the month of November 1781.

144. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 20.12.1779.

145. *Home (Public) Progs.* 20.4.1789.

not be implemented.<sup>146</sup> As the right of property had been protected by the Supreme Court, in cases of defaults an owner of a property could easily move before the court as the demand of *chowkedarry* was not a demand for rent. Probably on this ground the home authorities of the Company were hesitant in approving the "Police Bill" sent by Lord Cornwallis. This forced the Governor-General to make necessary acts on his own in the month of October 1791.<sup>147</sup>

It was expected that the Supreme Court "Shall not exercise any Jurisdiction in any matter Concerning the Revenue or concerning any act or acts ordered or done in the Collection thereof according to the usage and practice (sic) of the Country, or the Regulations of the Governor-General and Council."<sup>148</sup> Yet the Court took cognization of any complaint relating to the said tax.<sup>149</sup> Though the government was ultimately able to carry its decisions in imposing the *chowkedarry* tax, it failed to satisfy the inhabitants in general. After every despatch of the bill the police office was flooded with complaints from the inhabitants relating to such bills. To stop such a practice the Commissioners of police informed the inhabitants by an order dated, 11th August 1784 that, hereinafter no complaint would be accepted after three months of the date when the tax was to be paid.<sup>150</sup> But the residents also had sound defence. Unless they were given suitable protection they would not pay the tax. In a petition to the Governor General-in-Council the 'native' inhabitants of Calcutta, even complained for the absence of law and order in the town though they had been paying for the maintenance of the police.<sup>151</sup> The people

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146. *Home (Public) Progs.* 6.8.1792.

147. A. Aspinall, *op. cit.* p. 104.

148. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in Progs.* 10.2.1790.

149. *Home (Public) Progs.* 4.4.1787.

150. W. S. Seton-Karr, *Selections from Calcutta Gazette ...* vol. I. p. 5.

151. *Home (Public) Progs.* 15.12.1788.

used to blame the police force itself for the poor state of Calcutta.<sup>152</sup>

In the face of a substantial opposition to the assessments etc., it was once proposed to rationalise the tax structure so that poorer sections of the residents could be relieved from the incidence of such a tax. Since the poorer persons failed to remit the tax and regularly prayed for exemptions, it was then recommended by the Commissioners of Police that the "lower Class of Inhabitants Should be exempted from the Payment of Tax altogether." The proposal was that persons who lived in the houses at a rent of Rs. 5 and under should be exempted. And for this collections would not be affected.<sup>153</sup> But this recommendation was not implemented.

The government's problem became much serious when the Europeans refused to pay the tax. The physical punishments which were inflicted upon the Indians to recover tax arrears<sup>154</sup> could not be imposed on the Europeans. The continued favour which was bestowed upon them encouraged the Europeans to agitate for more concessions. So immediately after the imposition of the *chowkedarry* tax Col. Watson refused to pay it for the land on which he had been building the dock at Kidderpur.<sup>155</sup> It could not be traced whether he actually paid the tax or not. Col. Watson is not a solitary example. The Europeans in general, refused to pay the *chowkedarry* tax.<sup>156</sup> But they were neither persuaded nor chastised as the Indians were done to remit their dues.

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152. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 29.12.1780.

153. *Home (Public) Progs.* 1.2.1793.

154. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 29.12.1777.

155. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* Appendix to the month of September 1774.

156. *C. O. R Progs.* 17.8.1781.



10. *Conclusion.*

The Company's rule in Calcutta in its early colonial days, was basically geared to revenue and a police administration. From the nature of taxations in Calcutta, it has become clear that the Company seldom desired to rationalise the revenue structure as a whole and to give a boost to the newly born township. The expectation in the Company's administration always was that the revenues from Calcutta should increase steadily and uninterruptedly. The foreign rulers strongly believed that this would happen if the collections were under their direct control.<sup>157</sup> Since the Company's government had been suffering from a paucity of fund its administration was never efficient as it should have been.

As the ground rent could not be raised every year, the Company's government largely depended on other sources. It seldom failed to tap any source other than rent. Some of the taxes were withdrawn in the year 1788. This was done not to benefit the residents in general.<sup>158</sup> After a detailed calculation some taxes were considered unproductive to the government. Only the *chowkedarry* tax was retained because it affected properties and goods alike. The possibility of a progressive increase in collections was very bright here. Though the principle behind *chowkedarry* was to raise funds for the maintenance of the town police, the security accorded to the inhabitants were far from satis-

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157. *P. W. I. H.* vol. 5. Letter to the Court dated, 25.9.1769, para. 73 states that "Every year since we have held the Calcutta Lands hath been a pleasing & convincing proof to us how much this method of Collecting their value can be justly ascertained ... every year has been attended with an increase of Revenue without Oppression to the Ryott & .... such an Increase would not have been made if the Collections had not have been under our own management."

158. There had been a lot of such petty taxes and duties which directly or indirectly affected the common people. The per-

factory. The principal reason for such a poor performance by the police is to be sought in the policy of the Company itself. To raise revenue the Company allowed the farmer of the "arrack" *mahal* to issue licence to the retailers. Although there were certain restrictions in selling "arrack" inadequate vigilance failed to check the retailers. Moreover, there were bootleggers. It had been widely believed that the police were hand-in-glove with the "arrack"-sellers in the town. In 1787, Sir William Jones also observed that "the extremely deficient state of the Police in Calcutta .... The number of arrack shops and the houses of the thanadars (which, he had been told, were the receptacle of gamesters and drunkards) he considered as amongst the principal causes of the number of thefts and murders."<sup>159</sup> The efforts of Lord Cornwallis to improve the

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sons who used to pay their ground rents in *cowri* or conch-shells had to pay an extra amount on a ratio of one anna per rupee. This tax was called *cowri-sokt*. The principle behind this tax was that the payer had to compensate the damage or wastage of *cowri* due to handlings and transfers. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 29.4.1788.

The rural nature of the town was too explicit when it is found that *khooroh pancheh* or a duty on bullocks was in vogue in some parts of the town. Till 1758-59, this duty had been existent throughout Calcutta. But it was withdrawn at that time. It was a collection of 8 annas and 10 gondas per annum on each bullock retained by its owner. The *Buldeas* or petty traders had to pay this for their goods transport business. *B.O. R. Misc. Progs.* 29.4.1788.

Holwell writes on a type of duty charged on the newly-built boats and sloops. "Boat and Sloop Mahl" was one of the sources of the Company's revenues. Not only newly-built boats but also, the old ones were brought under taxation. The duty was called, *galay mangan*. It was a duty of one anna per rupee of purchase-money. *B. O. R. Sayer Progs.* 3.5.1790.

159. W. S. Seton-Karr, "Selections from the Calcutta Gazettee" *Calcutta Review*, vol. XXXIX. pp. 125-42".

state of police received lukewarm attention from the home authorities of the Company. Hence Calcutta was denied the patronage which it required earnestly. Too much interest was centred in collection of revenues only.

To raise the revenue it was desired to expand the territorial growth of the town. Calcutta's boundaries remained more or less the same for the entire period of our study. And non-progressive nature of the ground rent was due to low growth in the size of tax-paying population. Hence the Company's administration tried to maximize revenue by tapping all sources available. Proliferation of taxes was not conducive to the growth of population. Agitation against taxation and the government retreating vis-a-vis popular opposition was not rare as well. This was one of the rare phenomenons during those days. In any case the government could not create the milieu in which people could find it lucrative to settle here. People of lower order crowded in the town and they clustered in slums giving Calcutta a countenance which was far away from that of other progressively prospering towns. Calcutta was busy with activities and those activities, much glorified by historians, seldom moved beyond the margin of a functioning chaos. Calcutta was certainly taking shape and that shape was nothing more than that of overgrown villages clustered together in search of their own identities lost in the mess of a transforming era.

## DEMOGRAPHY OF URBANISATION

It is a common place observation that, during the second half of the eighteenth century Calcutta witnessed a steady increase in its population. All from Holwell to Warren Hastings had agreed this to be an event. But one cannot say with certainty how many people lived here in 1757, and how many in 1794. The problem of demographic quantification has become serious due to the non-availability of proper statistics of population. As there was no census during the period under study, one has to depend on certain other sources where he gets mainly qualitative statements.

From Holwell's report<sup>1</sup> it can be concluded that Calcutta in the middle of the eighteenth century was a vastly populated place. Even within a few years of the famine of 1770, the population of Calcutta was officially estimated to be increasing.<sup>2</sup> Again in 1785, the same was recorded by the Committee of Revenue in one of its proceedings.<sup>3</sup> In 1788, "The very populous state of Calcutta", was reported to the Court of Directors.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Holwell computed 51,132 houses which contained at least 4,09,056 people, "without reckoning the multitude that daily come in and return," *India Tracts*. p. 210.
  2. *R. B. W. C. Progs.* 17.5.1774.
  3. *C. O. R. Progs.* 24.3.1785.
  4. *P. W. I. H.* vol 10. Letter to the Court dated, 6.3.1788. para. 3.

Then it may be said that the inflow of immigrants, which had started long before the period under study, remained nearly unaltered during the entire second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Calcutta, it is commonly believed, constantly attracted people not only from various parts of Bengal but also, from the whole of India and even from places as far as Europe.

By certain turn of events Calcutta had already been attracting people. The rebellion of Sova Singh and more particularly, the Maratha raids in the 1740s had their contributions in that process. If one is to go by the statement of Sir Jadunath Sarkar that the booty acquired by Siraj during his sack of Calcutta in 1756, amounted to several lakhs of rupees,<sup>6</sup> it may then be said that Calcutta was never a paupers' den even before the battle of Palasi. Long after that event, in 1772, it was reported that the Nawab's primary object for invading Calcutta "was money, Calcutta was reported to be very rich, and so were the other European Settlements of Chandernagore and Chinsura."<sup>7</sup> Though that was a statement from a colonial official and that too long after things had actually happened this cannot be rejected as a conjecture only. The affluence of a place depends chiefly on the solvency of its inhabitants. Moreover, a town in the process of its growth can also attract elements which may generate affluence. Calcutta's pattern is somewhat uneven.

#### 1. *The Company's strictness : demographic constraint*

From the very beginning of the eighteenth century the Company was very cautious while admitting people in its

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5. A. K. Ray, *Op. cit.* Ch. 9.

6. J. N. Sarkar, *Bengal Nawabs* (Calcutta, Reprint 1985) p. 54.

7. Evidence of Richard Becher; extract from the First Report in S. C. Hill, *Bengal in 1756-1757*. vol. III. Appendix, III. p. 288.

settlement. But it could not check infiltrations which occurred time and again. Since its trading interests were always primary object it did never welcome such people who could or would pose challenge to its activities. Such an outlook gave birth to an town-administration which could not respond to the requirements of Calcutta.

Though this place also did have an indigenous artisan class and a merchant community for long they all declined because of the policies of the East India Company. Moreover, Calcutta was not a free town as could be found in Europe. It was a *zamindary* of a foreign trading company which ultimately conquered the place in February 1757. This Company had developed a concept of right of property which was unique in the Indian context. Its insistence in honouring the right strictly and its very cautious attitude in the beginning did not help Calcutta in having a population which was truly urban in character.

While persuing its principles regarding property the Company initiated certain new methods. In 1752-53 Holwell took possession of 500 *bighas* of charity ("Bermitter") land belonging to one Basdeo (Basudev) Burrum Charry (Brahmachari), a Hindu Brahmin, in exchange of which a *sunnud* of "Birt" was granted to him. The Brahmin could collect one handful out of every rupee worth in the sale of grain in all the "Gholas" etc., and one *cowri* per day from every shop for the worship of his deity.<sup>8</sup> First, the Company transferred its own onus on the inhabitants of the town. It had acquired land from a person and decided to compensate him with perpetual public contribution.

The Company's strictness while administering Calcutta did not confine itself to honouring the right of property

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8. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 15.6.1778 and *Selections* No. 419.

only. It tried to rule the place with a stringent hand. Since the days of the Maratha raids Calcutta, particularly the area inhabited by the whitemen was well guarded. Nobody could enter into that 'town' on his own will. Nor could a person settle there permanently without the permission from the Company's government. The free movements of the inhabitants were also restricted. By an order of 24th March 1765, the inhabitants of the town were prevented from going ten miles beyond the limits of the town without a prior permission of the authority.<sup>9</sup> Because of the policies of the Company itself the process of free as well as constant mobility among the people was then never possible. The regulations were so strict that a stranger could not buy properties in the town in his own name. Only the British, French and Dutch subjects other than Indians could do so.<sup>10</sup> Any purchase under fictitious name inevitably attracted punishments.<sup>11</sup>

It is very difficult to trace out the motives of the Company's government. Its strictness towards the outsiders was a paradox in the context of Calcutta being thought of as a growing urban centre of the country.

The Company's government exhibited its apathy towards all who were supposed to be its competitors in its trade ventures. This became much more clear after the battle of Palasi. The Armanians were a major sufferer. N. K. Sinha has mentioned the flourishing trade of different communities in Calcutta during the first half of the eighteenth century. He has particularly mentioned the

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9. *Selections* No. 845.

10. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 16.1.1789. A. K. Ray is wrong when he says that the "town was a settlement reserved exclusively for the three Christian nations, that is, for English, Portuguese and Armenians," See A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* p. 101.

11. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 6.1.1789.

Armenians.<sup>12</sup> They used to compete "in friendly rivalry with" the English in the trade of Bengal for a long time.<sup>13</sup> They also played a vital role in procuring certain political privileges as well as trading for the English in 1717. But soon after the battle of Palasi, their gradual decline commenced. In 1787, the Armenian population in Calcutta were reported to be declining.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the decline of the "Portuguese Asian" community was "a consequence of the fear of Catholic subversion during the French wars and also of the decline of the powerful Portuguese trading houses."<sup>15</sup> The close control which the Company had on Calcutta remained more or less in tact till 1813. The Charter of that year opened the trade of India to all and this in turn changed the atmosphere in Calcutta. The influx of various types of trading people in Calcutta more or less started in the close of the century.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. *Lack of employment.*

The basic constraint in generating employment was for the Company's failure to create sufficient opportunities during that period. With the battle of Palasi and also with the acquisition of *Diwani* in 1765 the Company's prestige and position were enhanced. In this context it was expected that Calcutta, being the headquarters of the Company's rule should attain some new position and create

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12. N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History* etc. vol. I. p. 71.

13. M. J. Seth, *The History of the Armenians in India* ..... (Calcutta, 1895) p. 65.

14. N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History* etc. vol. I. p. 72.

15. C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*. pp. 70-71.

16. Thomas A. Timberg, "A Note on the Arrival of Calcutta's Marwaris," in *B. P. P.* vol. XC. Pt. I. No. 169; — "The Jews of Calcutta" in *B. P. P.* vol. XCIII. Pt. I. 175, R. I. Crane, "Calcutta in the nineteenth century" in *B. P. P.* vol. XCIX. Pt. II. No. 189.



further job opportunities. No doubt, Calcutta underwent a sea-change during those formative days of the colonial rule in India. But inspite of all its changes it could not stimulate employment appreciably.

One may take the case of the weavers. Prior to the period of our study, Calcutta had sufficient number of weavers. Now they were of no use to the Company. It was reported on 31st January 1755, that the private merchants had utilised their service.<sup>17</sup> While gaining the political power in this province, the Company tried to dislodge the artisans gradually from their fields of works. Eric Hobsbawm writes how the cotton-goods export from England to India multiplied in the close of the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Significantly during the entire second half of the eighteenth century there was no reference to those weavers in Calcutta who had a good business in the first half of the century. In the process the employment potentiality in Calcutta was considerably reduced. On the other hand, the Company tried to monopolise the trade and had its own printing houses for printing chintz in Calcutta. Hence other printing houses were also shut down in 1773.<sup>19</sup>

The job potentiality of Calcutta was reduced when the Company's administration decided to bring about an economy in its administrative establishments. Thus the number of "servants" employed for collecting revenues in the Collector's *katcharri* was reduced from 145 to 89 only in 1773. However, later upon the request of the Roy Rayan another 22 men were employed.<sup>20</sup> Appointments were made strictly on the basis of the Company's own interests. While

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17. *Selections* No. 170.

18. E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (Pelican, 1978) p. 49.

19. *The Superintendent of Khalsa Progs.* vol. 2, 14.9.1773.

20. *R. B. W. U. Progs.* 29.10.1773 and, *The Superintendent of Khalsa Progs.* vol 3. 30.10.1773.

the bulk of the employees in revenue department were Indians, only those who rendered help to the English during the fateful years of the 1750's and 1760's<sup>21</sup> were selected.

It is generally accepted that the administration of Cornwallis from 1786 to 1793 was the decisive period when Indians gave way to Europeans.<sup>22</sup> But it is wrong to conclude that for new employment potentialities, the number of Europeans increased vastly. The Company's financial weakness had seriously curbed its capacity to spend liberally for the establishments. The situation was such that "the salary of an Alderman in the Mayor's Court is only about twenty-five pounds per ann. which will scarcely pay one month's house-rent in Calcutta."<sup>23</sup>

Soon after the battle of Palasi, imaginations and estimations of the Company's officials regarding the wealth of Bengal ran high. They began to lead a life of extravagance which their financial standings did not permit. They were assisted by their trusted Indian managers, the bani-ans. These men with their foreign masters acquired huge fortune, mostly through unscrupulous means. "Since the great influence acquired there by the English, many persons of the best Gentoo (i. e. Hindu) families take upon them this trust or servitude, and even pay a sum of money for serving gentlemen in certain posts."<sup>24</sup> Calcutta witnessed the sudden influx of such fortune-seekers who had a very low morality. Corruption infiltrated at every corner of administration. There is at least one document which proves the fact that an official high-up was hauled up in

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21. P. J. Marshall, "Indian Officials under the East India Company, 18th Century Bengal" in *B.P.P.* vol. LXXXIV Pt. II. No. 158.

22. *Ibid.*

23. William Bolts, *Considerations ...* (London, 1772) vol. I. p. 85.

24. *Ibid.* p. 84.

the court of law for taking bribe with a promise to give employment in the post of "Sigdar or Deputy Collector" in Baharbund pargana.<sup>25</sup>

Though Clive had tried to compensate the low pay of the Company's servants with other means so that they did not become corrupt, he failed. "It was only after his appointment to high offices in the later years of service that Shore was able to save and return to England with a sum of £ 2,500 honourably acquired. Writing in 1785, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, another honest civil servant, pointed out that India was no longer viewed as El Dorado."<sup>26</sup>

The low-pay certainly put restrictions on employment potentialities. Inadequate pay made the position of the officials, especially youngsters stringent. In 1767, the Select Committee even pointed out "that the majority were reduced to a bare monthly allowance, which would force them into debt." These persons ultimately turned to their banians as the only saviour.<sup>27</sup>

The story did not end here. In an order dated 29th March 1774, the Directors of the Company strictly regulated the employments in the Company.<sup>28</sup> They also directed in another letter dated, 26th September 1782, that "all Monthly Writers be forthwith discharged, & their places supplied by our own Junior Servants. But should any of these refuse to act in the different offices, such Persons must be immediately suspended from the Service."<sup>29</sup>

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25. *Supreme Court (Plea side)* 1778; Ram Sunkar Roy vs. Abram Jacob.

26. B. B. Misra, *The Bureaucracy in India. An Historical Analysis of Development up to 1947*. (New Delhi, 1980) p. 52.

27. L. S. S. O'Malley *The Indian Civil Service 1601-1930* (London, 1931) p. 16.

28. *General Letters from the Court of Directors, Revenue MSS.* Vol. 3. 26.9.1782; para. 4.

29. *Ibid.* para. 8.

During the entire second half of the eighteenth century, the Company successfully prevented the entry of the free merchants from England in its territories. For this its stocks used to fetch high prices in London as the buying of them meant the holders or their connections could get "lucrative appointments in India."<sup>30</sup> Certainly a portion of such persons tried to arrive at Calcutta. So it was not natural to expect any service from such men that could be conducive to an urban growth. Still the number of civil servants in whole of Bengal was not remarkable. "In the course of a Commons debate on Pitt's India Bill, for instance, it was stated that out of 508 civil servants appointed between 1762 and 1784, only 37 returned to England, 150 had died and 321 were still in Bengal, with perhaps no prospect of returning home in affluence."<sup>31</sup>

When the Company constantly prevented the entry of private English merchants until 1813, it also gradually ousted the Indian competitors. Only when the Agency Houses began to function in the 1780's the Indians along with private Europeans could regain some of their lost grounds. Still the number of Europeans did not increase remarkably. C. A. Bayly notes that there were only 4000 Europeans residing in Calcutta in 1790 though the genuineness of the figure is doubtful.<sup>32</sup> But they were to wait till the grant of the Charter of 1813 with which "the influx of a new set of adventurers from Britain" changed the prevailing conditions.<sup>33</sup>

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30. P. J. Marshall, *Problems of Empire* .. pp. 27-28.

31. B. B. Misra, *The Bureaucracy in India* ... p. 52.

32. C. A. Bayley, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*. p. 71.

33. Blair B. Kling, "Economic Foundations of the Bengal Renaissance," in *Aspects of Bengali History and Society*, ed. by R. Van M. Baumer (New Delhi, Reprint, 1976) p. 29.

### 3. *Shortage of labour.*

But the rulers in India had a tradition in creating employments for long. The official constructions in the immediate preceeding regime in India used to create several types of employments.<sup>34</sup> Even during the great famine of 1783 in Oudh, the Bara Imambara created more than 20,000 regular jobs in Lucknow.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Sawai Jai Singh in the earlier decades of the eighteenth century undertook a massive building works in Jaipur which in turn created a lot of employments.<sup>36</sup> During our period of study the Company undertook the construction of the new fort. If one is to go by the findings of P. J. Marshall then, between 1757 and 1761 the fort offered jobs to unskilled labours whose numbers varied between 16 or 17 thousands and 30,000.<sup>37</sup> But in 1768, coolies were not available in Calcutta and they were to be brought from outside.

One of the major reasons for such was the recurrent famines and other calamities. Bengal had also suffered from the devastating effects of the Maratha raids in 1740's. The devastations were even compounded by the terrible exactions made by Nawab Alivardi Khan. The ultimate result was the decline in agricultural productivity and mass-scale unemployment in the countryside.<sup>38</sup> The sufferings in the rural areas were dual in nature. First the regular outbreak of natural calamities, epidemics etc., and

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34. Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, "Towns in Mughal India" in the *Journal of History*; Jadavpur University. No. I, 1971-2.
  35. C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars ...* p. 135.
  36. Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Jaipur* (N. Delhi, 1989) ed. by Raghubir Singh, pp. 205-07.
  37. P. J. Marshall, "The Company and the Coolies : Labour in Early Calcutta", in *The Urban Experience : Calcutta*, (Calcutta, 1987) ed. by P. Sinha, p. 25.
  38. *The Cambridge Economic History of India* Vol. II. pp. 6-7 and 14.

secondly, the exactions by the landlords. "On the eve of the Permanent Settlement (1793) an English officer noted that one-third of the land still remained vacant of cultivators, and it was not until nearly thirty years after the Famine of 1770 that abundant import of labour and growth of a new generation restored the cultivation of Bengal."<sup>39</sup>

Still Calcutta was the only place where jobs could be available, however little that might be. Yet Calcutta suffered for scarcity of skilled and unskilled workmen. The basic reason for the shortage was the low rate of wages which the Company used to pay its workmen. As early as 1757, it was complained that the coolies in the fort were cheated.<sup>40</sup> In a letter to the Directors in 1767, the Council at the fort expressed its apprehensions for the delay of the completion of the new fort due to labour shortage.<sup>41</sup> In 1770, the Governor asked the *faujdar* of Hughli to send workmen from there with an assurance that they would receive same wages which were then paid by the French.<sup>42</sup> Then it was discovered that the wages demanded by the workmen of Murshidabad were much lower than that demanded by the men from Hughli though the latter place was much nearer Calcutta than the former was.<sup>43</sup>

The Company too was aware of this shortage. In anticipation of a possible French attack upon Calcutta, the Company arranged shelter in the fort only for the white-men and their attendants. It was also decided to house those "coolies" who were required to work in the "out

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39. Aditi Nag Chowdhury-Zilly, *The Vagrant Peasant, Agrarian Distress and Desertion in Bengal, 1770 to 1830* (Wiesbaden, 1982) p. 40.

40. *Selections*. No. 243.

41. *F. W. I. H.* Vol. 5. Letter to the Court dated, 14.9.1767, para. 33.

42. *C. P. C.* Vol. III. No. 23.

43. *C. P. C.* Vol. III. No. 38.

works'' of the fort.<sup>44</sup> Probably that protection was inadequate for keeping the workmen in good humour. To allure the coolies from the 24 Parganas, their wages were raised from monthly 3 *sonat* Rupees to 3 *sicca* Rupees from 14th July 1773.<sup>45</sup> From the next year all the coolies engaged in the fort were paid on that rate.<sup>46</sup> Still the prevailing rates of wages were considered low. In 1773, the Superintendent of Police failed to procure arround 130 to 137 persons for cleaning of drains of the town.<sup>47</sup>

This was a common picture. During the same period Benjamin Lacam failed to procure workmen while constructing a harbour in the south of Calcutta.<sup>48</sup> Similar was the experience of Major Tolley who was engaged in cutting the canal.<sup>49</sup> The Company utilised its administrative powers and decided to procure workmen from anywhere in the province.<sup>50</sup> But the private individuals did not have that privilege.

There are several arguments for such non-availability of workmen in Calcutta. The principal cause was the presence of *metrifeh*, a tax imposed on certain types of low as well as professional castes of the Hindu society. These people constituted the major workforce in India. It acted as a direct hindrance to the population growth. After 1781, a large number of people who were subjected to that tax migrated from the town. That exodus resulted in the sharp

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44. *Select Committee Progs.* 28.6.1770.

45. *The Superintendent of Khalsa Progs.* 19.6.1773. For *sonat* and *sicca* see, A. M. Khan; *The Transition in Bengal, 1765-1775*, etc. (Cambridge, 1969).

46. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed Vol. 10.11.1774.

47. *R. B. W. C. Progs.* typed Vol 12.4.1774.

48. *Cal C. O. R. Progs.* 21.11.1776.

49. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 30.5.1776.

50. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed Vol. 30.12.1774.

fall of service people in Calcutta.<sup>51</sup> The shortage of labour was certainly due to the shortage of stationary population. The Company's failure to create jobs of some permanent nature in the town and also the low wages and official exactions made the matter worse. Though A. K. Ray says of large-scale inflow<sup>52</sup> in the town after 1757, the Company actually had to bring workmen from other places during the same period<sup>53</sup> for very nominal works.

Even it had to bring three hundred palanquin bearers from Burdwan to carry palanquins from Calcutta to Murshidabad.<sup>54</sup> It has been claimed that Maharaja Naba-krishna persuaded the Oriyas to come to Calcutta to work as palanquin-bearer, gardener and cook.<sup>55</sup> But the Oriyas were not free in the town. Usually they were under the leadership and guidance of certain influential men, who used to act as "*sirdars*" or headmen. Between the *sirdars* and their recruits there existed a type of bond by which the recruits were to pay a commission to their respective "*sirdars*". This system certainly acted as a deterrent towards the growth of the Oriya population in the town. Ultimately, this cess was proposed to be abolished in the year 1790.<sup>56</sup> But in actual case that was only on paper.

Like the government, all in the town paid low wages for their domestic and other servants. It is surprising that the wages paid to the domestic servants and others were increased in a very selective cases between the years

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51. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 10.2.1790.

52. A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* p. 196.

53. *C. P. C.* Vol. III. Nos. 23, 55, 88.

54. *C. P. C.* Vol. III. No. 497.

55. Binay Krishna Deb, *The Early History and Growth of Calcutta*. (Calcutta 1977) ed. by Subir Ray Choudhuri, pp. 49-50.

56. *B. O. R. Sayer Progs.* 26.7.1790.



1754 and 1785<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the wages which had been contracted, were often not paid to the employees. That practice caused terrible disorder to the work culture. There are even records of some court cases relating to this.<sup>58</sup> Most probably, the officials of the Company were responsible for such things. Even "A custom grew up of using soldiers as personal servants, and in 1778 we have a list of twenty-nine European soldiers and sepoys who were serving high officers and civilians in capacities ranging from groom, coachman, bagpiper and theatre attendant to huntsman and cookfeeder."<sup>59</sup>

Behind such a perspective, it was not possible that a large number of people would regularly arrive as permanent work force in the town. Moreover, the problem relating to caste among the Hindus was a major factor in labour mobilization. A person belonging to a high caste seldom resided besides a low-caste person. The existence of the right of pre-emption too acted to prevent such co-habitation. But the crux of the problem was that when a low-caste person after his migration into the town tried to establish himself as a high-caste man. This obviously led to hue and cry. In an urban society, it is very difficult to maintain segregation along the caste line. In general the caste system with all its rigours operated against the mobility of labour and the progress of society. But in Calcutta the people, especially the Hindus tried to maintain this system rigidly. For sometimes there was a caste-

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57. W. S. Seton-Karr, "Selections from the Calcutta Gazettes of the years, 1784, 1785..." in *Calcutta Review* vol. XXXIX. (1864).

58. *Mayor's Court* 1772; Charles Child vs. Edward Rock. *Supreme Court (Plea Side)* 1780; Joorung Kennoo and others vs. Thomas Lyon.

59. P. Spear, *The Nabobs: A study of the Social Life of the English in 18th Century India*. (Oxford, 1963) p. 31.

court "for the adjustment of disputes relative to the lower Caste, such as Gwalas (*milkmen*), Weavers, Mollies (*gardeners*) & c." Its abolition was opposed by the Dewan of the Calcutta Committee of Revenue.<sup>60</sup> Since Calcutta did not have a traditional facade of an Indian town the intermingling of various castes could not be avoided. This was not to the liking of the high-caste Hindus. They usually did not prefer to settle permanently in the town for such a fact. Still Nabakhishna took personal initiative in bringing and settling the "Kulin" Kayasthas in Calcutta.<sup>61</sup>

This caste-barrier and low wage structure kept labour mobilization in Calcutta extremely poor. This was true particularly in the cases of domestic servants. Though some Europeans used to live lavishly and could employ more than a hundred servants for a family of four only, the generation of domestic employment was generally low.<sup>62</sup> P. J. Marshall is of opinion that the European masters used to offer land to their domestic servants in the town.<sup>63</sup> But in all probability it may be said that such a practice was a rare phenomenon. The servants along with their families had "possession in land,"<sup>64</sup> meaning they were living with their masters' quarters. In fact, the service conditions and other allied benefits offered by the Indian masters were much better than those offered by the Europeans. The matter was such that the government enacted the rules for minimum wages and certain penal provisions to keep the servants in the service of their respective masters in 1774. Again it framed detailed regulations in August 1787 on this. It was then clearly stated that "the Wages of Native

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60. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 7.11.1775.

61. N. N. Ghose, *Memoirs of Maharaja Nubkissen Bahadur*. (Calcutta, 1911) p. 173.

62. P. J. Marshall, *The Company and the Coolies* etc. pp. 23-4.

63. *Ibid.* p. 25.

64. *Selections*. No. 418.

Servants of every denomination in the Employ of Europeans resident in Calcutta and neighbourhood, be fixed ... with proper Allowances for the Subsistence of his Family, Cloths (sic), House Rent and other Incidental Charges, and calculated upon the average Price of Provisions and other Necessaries of life for the years 1777, 1780, 1785 and 1786.”<sup>65</sup>

In the prevailing atmosphere it is very difficult to imagine that a large scale inflow could ever take place which in turn could change the size and structure of the population in Calcutta. If Marshall is to be believed then “Large-scale migration of the rural poor into Calcutta seems only to have taken place in exceptional years.”<sup>66</sup> Still how many of those constituted actual labour force is not possible to determine.

But slavery in Calcutta was patronised by a section of the European population just for trading venture. Since the inter-national slave trade was lucrative one the Europeans encouraged slave-breeding for that purpose. Certainly the government was knowledgeable of this. But it failed to show an inclination to abolish such a medieval system.

#### 4. *Shortage of food.*

Another basic problem was undoubtedly related to food-supply. In Calcutta, supply of food was not enough to sustain its people. During the closing year of the Maratha raids in 1752, the prices of provisions in Calcutta rose “owing in the first and greatest parts to the Great Famine and scarcity of all kinds of necessities of life.”<sup>67</sup> Calcutta could not overcome this scarcity substantially throughout the period under study.

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65. *Home (Public) Progs.* 13.8.1787.

66. P. J. Marshall, *The Company and the Coolies* etc. p. 34.

67. *Selections.* No. 99.

Recurrent famines led to the rise of food-prices all over the province.<sup>68</sup> Occasionally price-rise was devastating. Food was exported to Madras. The process of draining country of its food staff had started soon after the battle of Palasi.

Though it was very difficult, yet the government had to arrange for the regular supply of foodstuff in the town. This was for its own sake. Higher cost of food could certainly raise the clamour for the salary revision by the Company's servants. For this "Calcutta was well supplied with grain at a time when many places from which it was brought were destitute" during the worst days of 1770.<sup>69</sup> But 1770 was an extra-ordinary year. Roughly speaking the supplies in the town were never satisfactory. There are very contradictory reports which highlighted this issue. It has been reported at one place<sup>70</sup> that in 1761, provisions were very cheap in Calcutta. 1761 was one year when Bengal had to suffer a severe famine and the selling of children in Calcutta in that year was an usual scene.<sup>71</sup> But in another place<sup>72</sup> we find that in the immediately preceding year, i.e. in 1760, Calcutta had witnessed scarcity of "grain of every kind." It is difficult to conclude that the situation changed for such a batterment even in the face of overall deterioration throughout the province.

But for otherwise compulsions in January 1772, the *fauzdar* of Balasore Abdul-lah Khan was specifically asked "to use his best endeavour in Collecting rice" for

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68. Ole Fledback, "Cloth Production and Trade in Late 18th century Bengal : A Report from the Danish Factory in Serampore." in *B. P. P. Diamond Jubilee Number*.

69. N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History*, etc. vol. II. p. 57.

70. *C. P. C.* vol. I. No. 1347.

71. *C. P. C.* vol. I. No. 1245.

72. *Selections*. No. 465.

Calcutta.<sup>73</sup> When it was too difficult to maintain uninterrupted supplies to Calcutta, the Company could not stop export of food from here. Though there had been an embargo on it for sometimes that was ultimately withdrawn from 1st January 1774.<sup>74</sup>

It was known to the Company that if it wanted to supply food to other presidencies then the supplies to Calcutta should be constant. Out of this compulsion, the Company encouraged the grain-traders to procure grain for Calcutta. Due to their large purchase the districts suffered. It was even complained that "the Calcutta merchants purchased and remove what supply reaches Murshidabad." To prevent this, it was requested by Bhojraj, the chief grain merchant of Murshidabad to the Nawab "that the prices may be controlled through executive orders."<sup>75</sup> But grain could not reach Calcutta duty-free. Though there was severe food crisis, the government did not reduce its duties on grains imported into Calcutta.<sup>76</sup> Hence, price of rice escalated. Such been the great rise in the price of rice, that people who in ordinary times supported themselves and their families by labour, have no longer found a maintenance from it. By this process Calcutta became the only shelter of destitutes, who had been entering into the town in large number from distant places. The matter took such a serious turn that relief committees were to be organised by public benevolence to feed those.

##### 5. *Shortage of shelter.*

Just like food-shortage the shortage of shelter was also

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73. C. P. C. vol. III. No. 1019.

74. C. P. C. vol. IV. No. 683.

75. C. P. C. vol. VIII. No. 125.

76. C. P. C. vol. VIII No. 486.

a problem of permanent nature in Calcutta. A. K. Ray maintained the view that Calcutta grew fast between 1742 and 1753,<sup>77</sup> those years when the Marathas raided Bengal. Ray is of opinion that the building activities increased in Calcutta in the 1750s.<sup>78</sup> At the same time he writes that there were only 45 houses in Chowringhee (one of the most important place of concentration of the Europeans in Calcutta) as late as 1794.<sup>79</sup> The real picture was far from being rosy. Calcutta during those days suffered from the shortage of shelter. Even the servants of the Company could not afford to rent house nor could the administration solve the problem. The problem assumed a quasi-permanent nature. In a letter to the Directors, the Council at Calcutta mentioned the high cost of living including a high house-rent, once in 1763 and again in 1766.<sup>80</sup> The Directors also expressed their unhappiness on it.<sup>81</sup> for the high rent, the Company remained very much affected. It failed to erect necessary structures to meet even the administrative and defence requirements. As early as 1761, it expressed its inability to accommodate troops coming from Madras into Calcutta.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, in 1766 it incurred the Directors' displeasure when it had purchased a house and godowns for Rs. 30,000 to be used as import warehouse. The local officials were warned against such purchase in future.

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77. A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* p. 99.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

80. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 3. Letter to the Court dated 19.12.1763; para, 108 and also, *F. W. I. H.* vol. 5. Letter from same to same dated 8.9.1766; para. 27.

81. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 5. Letter from the Court dated, 4.3.1767; para. 8.

82. *U. P. C.* vol. I. No. 1324.

83. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 5. Letter from the Court dated 16.3.1766; para. 49.

For the failure of the Company to provide necessary accommodation to its servants the problem was aggravated. The scarcity of houses in Calcutta had been an age-old problem. Prior to the battle, in 1754, it attracted attention.<sup>84</sup> For the inadequacy of civil constructions, it was said that the Company's servants could not get shelter to live in with the salary which they used to receive. When the annual salary of a senior merchant of the Company was £ 225, the annual rent of a house of his living standard was no less than £ 1000.<sup>85</sup> Philip Francis had to pay £ 500 a year in 1774, for what was called to be a very "mean house" to stay in.<sup>86</sup> Justice Hyde was to pay far more for his house beside the Supreme Court. In 1780, he was paying Rs. 1200 per month as rent for his accommodation.<sup>87</sup> Lt. Thomas Martin, Judge and Advocate General even complained that with his salary he could not get a house.<sup>88</sup> It was accepted officially as late as 1792 that the rents in Calcutta were usually high.<sup>89</sup>

If one goes by the statistics presented by A. K. Ray on the houses of Calcutta, he gets a dismal picture. According to his estimation between 1726 and 1742 i.e., just prior to the Maratha invasions, the number of "pucka" houses increased by only 81 and "kutchra" by another 1,447 and, again between 1742 and 1756, i.e., during the worst years of the Maratha raids, the number of "pucka" houses

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84. *F. W. I. H.* vol. I. Letter to the Court dated, 4.1.1754; para. 116.

85. P. J. Marshall, *The East Indian Fortunes* ... p. 159.

86. H. E. Busteed, *Echoes from Old Calcutta* (Calcutta, 1897), p. 187.

87. W. K. Firminger, "The Notebooks of Justice John Hyde" in *B. P. P.* vol. III.

88. *Home (Public) Progs.* 26.10.1784, Similar complaint was lodged by the Collector of Calcutta, *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 18.7.1786.

89. *Home (Public) Progs.* 16.11.1792.

increased by 377 and interestingly, the number of "kutcha" actually decreased by 27. He has also presented figures for 1794, the year when the boundary of the town was officially demarcated. Between 1756 and 1794, the number of "pucka" or brick-built houses increased by 616 and, "kutcha" decreased by 793.<sup>90</sup> From these figures it is clear that between 1756 and 1794, the actual number of dwellings decreased by 77. If we are to rely on these statistics then, it is too difficult to believe that there was any large scale settlement in the town during the second half of the eighteenth century. So it is not what has been believed by many that there was in Calcutta about this time a "hectic boom in private building."<sup>91</sup> That was not possible by any standard because private building was banned by the Company in 1768 and the ban was reinforced again in 1770 and in 1783.<sup>92</sup>

In fact, the number of constructions increased sharply after 1794. Only then the numbers of the "pucka" and the "kutcha" buildings could be compared impressively.<sup>93</sup> In fact in the 1820's there were only 67,519 dwellings in Calcutta. Even the official records say, "the number of respectable and wealthy native house-holders is not insreasing in Calcutta."<sup>94</sup> When the actual position was this then none can conclude that the population stationary and fixed

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90. A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* p. 125.

91. P. J. Marshall, *The Company and the Coolies etc.* p. 24.

92. *Ibid.* p. 30.

93. The number of houses in 1821, was of 2-storied 5430 and of 1-storied 8,800, making a total of "pucca" houses 14,230 and the native huts, both straw-roofed and tiled were 51,289. Hence, the total number of dwellings of all kinds were 65,519. The Government of Bengal; *Selections from the Records of the Government of Bengal.* (Calcutta, 1908) vol. III. pp. 2-3.

94. D. & B. Bhattacharyya, *Report on the Population Estimates of India, 1820-1830* in Census of India, 1961. (Office of the Registrar General, India; Delhi, 1965) pp. 234-5.



in terms of habitation was registering a considerable growth rate.

6. *Shortage of building materials.*

Calcutta also suffered from a shortage of adequate building materials. The three villages of Sutanuti, Calcutta and Gobindapur had grown up on alluvial soil. From time immemorial the river Hughli has been suffering from daily tidal bores. Siltations used to occur in the river-bed and also on the sides of the banks. But none thought of using the silt on the river-side in making bricks. Probably it was never a practice here. As a result the number of brick-built houses was too small in comparison with that of the other structures. Often some amounts of brick were brought here from the neighbouring 15 *Dihis*. Probably those could satisfy a very insufficient percentage of the total requirements. In fact, the Company itself failed to procure bricks which were to be used in building the fort.<sup>95</sup> And no private person was allowed to manufacture brick. A contractor engaged to supply bricks to the Company was to furnish an undertaking that he would not sell bricks to any private party.<sup>96</sup>

Another factor for the absence of sufficient brick structures was the non-availability of brick-layers. This in turn suggests the absence of a tradition relating to brick buildings in Calcutta. Sufficient brick-layers could not be found to carry out works in the fort in 1760.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, the Company had to bring brick-manufacturers from Chander-nagore and Hughli in 1762 as, they could not be found even in neighbouring places of Calcutta.<sup>98</sup> In the face of

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95. *Home (Public) Progs.* 20.7.1768.

96. *Home (Public) Progs.* 7.11.1768.

97. *Selections.* No. 451.

98. *C. P. C.* vol. I. No. 1621.

so many obstacles the Company had to shut down its own manufacturing unit in 1767.<sup>99</sup>

Occasionally people tried to manufacture bricks here and there in unorganized and sporadic form. To prevent such sporadic manufactures, a police regulation was issued in 1780. "In the interest of public health, the burning or making of bricks and lime was also prohibited within a distance of at least two miles from the town of Calcutta."<sup>100</sup>

As bricks could not be procured easily, inhabitants of the town occasionally adopted crooked means to satisfy their needs. They dug land and manufactured bricks clandestinely. But the digging of land meant the loss of land and ultimately loss of rent. That was a thing which nobody could afford. So some people resorted to unfair means. They dug land belonging to others.<sup>101</sup> There is at least one litigation in which one Comul (Kamal) Mundull (Mandal) filed a suit in the Supreme Court against one Sam (Shyam) Pal alleging that the defendant with his men had assaulted the plaintiff on the ground that the plaintiff had dug soil from the defendant's land for building-purposes.<sup>102</sup> Land digging for brick-manufacture could not be stopped for a very long period. It was noticed as late as 1835 that people used to dig indiscriminately.<sup>103</sup>

Non-availability of brick made its price higher. For this the building works were too limited. Even not a single temple of worth-mentioning could be found in the town

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99. *Selections*. No. 930.

100. B. B. Misra, *The Judicial Administration of the East India Company*, p. 350.

101. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 10.3.1777.

102. *Supreme Court (Plea Side)*, 1778, Comul Mundull vs. Sam Paul.

103. *Fever Hospital Progs.* Printed vol. No. I. p. 26.

which was built by brick during the period under study.<sup>104</sup> Once a committee was formed to construct a church in the town with the official patronage. The Committee raised subscriptions for the same. To save expenditure the committee's secretary even proposed to bring stone from Maldah, by demolishing the mosques of Gour, the ancient capital of Bengal.<sup>105</sup> However, this plan did not materialise.

A detailed examination on availability of other building materials also reveals disheartening picture.

Another item for house-building in those days was *soorky* or brick-dust. Since there was seldom any mention of any brick kiln in and around Calcutta, the availability of *soorky* seemed to be remote. There is only one evidence of a *soorky*-mill and that too stood on the other side of the river.<sup>106</sup> Similarly, the use of iron in house-building was very limited. Though iron was yet to be introduced in house-building in India, it is not unfair to think that the officials of the Company who must have noticed the growing trend in the utilisation of iron in their own country were likely to venture in this hitherto unexplored field in India. Moreover, smelting of iron ore had not been unknown in Bihar prior to the period of our study.<sup>107</sup> Iron mines during the period under study, in Birbhoom district were regularly farmed out to bidders.<sup>108</sup> One J. Farquhar once proposed to build canons from the iron of Birbhoom

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104. David McCutcheon, "The Temples of Calcutta. "in *B. P. P.* vol. LXXXVII. Pt. I. No. 163.

105. *C. O. R. Progs.* 17.6.1784.

106. *Supreme Court (Plea Side)*, 1783. Raja Ramlochan Roy vs. Col. Charles Morgan, William Wodsworth and Colly Sunker Bose.

107. *Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. II, p. 21.

108. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 21.11.1777, Enclosure No. 29.

and Ramgarh.<sup>109</sup> But the Company did not explore the possibilities in developing industries based on that metal. Raniganj was also famous for its rich clay and magnetic iron deposits. There can be little doubt that, were the manufacture of iron successfully introduced, Raniganj would become one of the richest and most important districts in Bengal.<sup>110</sup> Such rich iron and limestone reserves of Burdwan and Birbhoom<sup>111</sup> were not utilised for mass-scale consumption.

But iron was required. Its chief requirements was for military purpose. Throughout the eighteenth century iron was one of the major import items of the Company from England.<sup>112</sup> Even prior to the period of our study iron was imported into Calcutta from Russia and Gottenburgh in Germany.<sup>113</sup> Still no effort was made to give iron industry a footing in Bengal.

Now we judge the question of energy. A hurdle for burning bricks was the lack of proper supply of fuels. During that period coal was not used as a source of fuel. Though there were rich coal reserves in some nearby districts those were yet to be unearthed. Hence, the only source of energy was charcoal which was produced by burning wood. But its supplies were too limited as it was heavily used in the making of gunpowder.<sup>114</sup>

Given what has been said above the idea of a boom in civil construction in Calcutta during those days seems to

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109. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* typed vol. 24.3.1778.

110. W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*. (N. Delhi Reprint, 1973), vol. V. p. 125.

111. *Ibid.*, p. 318.

112. P. J. Marshall, *The Problems of Empire* ... p. 79.

113. *Home (Public) Progs.* 5.11.1753.

114. *Home (Public) Progs.* 20.5.1766.

be a conjecture. When the improved as well as the tangible materials were not used to build houses then the inhabitants had to reside agreeably in age-old clay houses and in straw-huts.<sup>115</sup> All these were constraints towards a planned urban growth. The innumerable straw huts were also a constant source of danger from fire in the town. Though a regulation was passed in 1786 prohibiting their constructions, they remained.<sup>116</sup> Even many days after the period under study, the majority of the Portuguese community in Calcutta lived "the slum life".<sup>117</sup>

Gradually the fencing around Calcutta were removed throwing open its gates for a regular influx. The people of the interior started an endless journey to Calcutta. They generally erected innumerable mud and straw huts there by paying a scant respect to civic norms. The presence of slums may be said, was due to the non-availability of actual resource and also of exact building materials. Scholars who believe that there was a "rapid development" of Calcutta during the period under study,<sup>118</sup> also say that the possession of slums (bustee) was viewed "prized possession".<sup>119</sup> So there were slums in Calcutta and in fact, majority of the habitation was the slums fully unorganized and unhealthy.

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- 115. H. B. Hyde, *Parochial Annals of Bengal. Being A History of the Bengal Ecclesiastical Establishment of the Hon'ble East India Company in the 17th and 18th Centuries.* (Calcutta, 1901), p. 141.
  - 116. *Fever Hospital Progs.* 11.5.1837, pp. 107-08. A Sub Committee recommends a compulsory rule to prohibit the construction of straw huts, as these were causes of fire. Between January and May in that year 31,462 straw huts and 16,582 tiled huts were burnt.
  - 117. J. J. A Campos, *Portuguese in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1919), p. 195.
  - 118. P. Sinha, *op. cit.* p. 13.
  - 119. *Ibid.*, pp. 16 and 19.

The Europeans had a different problem. Those who used to come here empty-handed always tried to return their homes as "nabobs." These "nabobs" used to live very lavishly employing a large number of servants in various categories who were lodged in innumerable slums. Once Mr. Vansittart removed some ryots from his land in the vicinity of Chowringhee to enable the sepoys to erect their barracks there. The displaced persons soon occupied six *bigha* eleven *cottah* land on Chowringhee to erect their slum.<sup>120</sup> In 1777, it was officially reported that the Esplanade instead of being cleared, was daily becoming more crowded by new structures.<sup>121</sup> The slums were built indiscriminately. Illegal straw huts were built even beside the Court House,<sup>122</sup> and also beside the Government House in the Esplanade.<sup>123</sup> The business area of Bara Bazar was not spared.<sup>124</sup> No doubt that the high-up persons used to patronise their servants in erecting the slums so that they could easily procure their (i.e., servants') service. Moreover, the cost of huts were nominal. The Europeans could purchase them at their free will.<sup>125</sup> Again for this Calcutta became full of huts. Even in the 1820s one finds that there were 51,289 "native" huts, both tiled and straw-roofed whereas, the "pucca" houses numbered only 14,230.<sup>126</sup>

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120. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 10.11.1774 and *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* typed vol. 9.3.1775.

121. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 27.2.1777.

122. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 17.11.1774.

123. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 3.11.1778.

124. W. K. Firminger, "Materials for the History of Calcutta Streets and Houses, 1780-1834." in *B. P. P.* vol. XIV. Pt. 1.

125. *Mayor's Court*, 1760. Brian O Neall vs. John Reed.

126. The Government of Bengal, *Selections from the Records of the Government of Bengal*, vol. III. p. 2-3.

7. *Landlord-tenant relations.*

When there was a perennial crisis of shelter the relation between landlords and tenants was seldom cordial. The records of the Mayor's Court and the Supreme Court make this point clear. Litigations were rampant and all cases were filed by the house-owners against their respective tenants for the recovery of rents. They often alleged to have borne strains in constructing a house which they said, they had let out to others.<sup>127</sup> Hence house-owner legitimately looked forward to extracting the maximum rent from his house. The contracts were very stringent and, usually unfavourable to a tenant. From the nature of such contracts it is evident that the tenants were at the mercy of their respective house-owners.<sup>128</sup>

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127. *Supreme Court* (Plea Side) 1779. Ram Sunkar Dutt vs. Ramsay William.

128. *Mayor's Court*, 1757. Inventory of John Afon. A Bill of Demand upon Mr. Collin Campbell on 6th September 1757 for house rent from 1st March 1757 to 1st September @ A. Rs. 75/- per month.

*Mayor's Court*, 1764. Zachariah Boggerman vs. John Renolds. Here the rents commenced from the 15th of a month and that was not deposited for five months.

*Mayor's Court*, 1767. Ann Baptist vs. Henry Looker. In this suit it was alleged that the tenant was to pay the rent of the preceeding month on the very first day of the succeeding month.

*Mayor's Court*, 1770. Mary Barclay vs. Senlonius Grant. In this suit, the plaintiff alleged that she had not received the full rent @ A. Rs. 100/- per month from 15th April to 15th October, 1770. Against the total rental amount of A. Rs. 600/- she had received only A. Rs. 270/-. Hence, the suit for the recovery of the residual amount.

In all these suits, the house-owners moved before the court without serving any notice or like that upon their respective tenants.

On the basis of information presented by P. Sinha some conclusions may be drawn. Often the rich Indians possessed considerable estates predominantly in the European areas in the town. Those were acquired from the Europeans when they failed to return the advanced amount received from their respective banians. Though there was right of pre-emption the neighbouring whitemen in majority of the cases were not in a position to buy the houses. Sometimes those were specifically obtained for letting out to the Europeans and particularly, the servants of the Company.<sup>130</sup> The owners probably thought that the "High services" would secure the rent.<sup>131</sup> Though the customs and also legal arrangements often forbade them to reside within the European localities, owning of property was not discouraged.

In case of defaults, which was then very common, the house-owner had to move before the court of law. Interestingly enough, there is only one record preserved in the Calcutta High Court Archives, in which a house-owner lodged a suit against his tenant for eviction on the grounds of default.<sup>132</sup> The owners always insisted on payment of due rents. From the nature of the suits, it is clear that the tendency of the tenants were to default and then to flee. And probably for this the house-owners' suits were all treated as money suits and, not as ejectment suits. Rela-

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129. P. Sinha, *op. cit.* Appendix No. III.

130. Dilip Bose, "The Early Banians of Calcutta : The Setts and Bysakhs in their own Image", in *B. P. P.* vol. XC. Pt. I. No. 169. One Jaggomohun Bysakh ran a little hostel in the "English quarters of the town to accommodate the newly arrived civilians before they felt acclimatized and settled."

131. *Supreme Court (Plea Side)*, 1791. Ram Nidi Mukherjee vs. John Wood.

132. *Supreme Court (Plea Side)*, 1780. John Doe on the demise of Preteram Does vs. Henry Robinson.



tions between landlords and their tenants were far from cordial. Here the house-owners and tenants both tried to score a point upon each other. There is another feature of this situation. In fact, there is no record available to show that the Indians resided as tenants in the houses owned by others. But their presence could be found in the slums. So it was another picture of the pattern of settlement in Calcutta.

#### 8. *Climate and public health.*

Another chief constraint was the climate. The rain and wet atmosphere of the area was never to the liking of the Europeans. And that was nothing new. Since the Mughal days, it had been presumed as a punishment to be posted in Bengal. So it was not unusual to find that the high officials of the Company did not prefer living within the town. Clive, Hastings, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Sir William Jones—all preferred living away from the town.<sup>133</sup>

When the climate was bad and amenities nominal, Calcutta was attacked time and again by epidemic. Clive first complained of the severe unhealthy condition of Calcutta.<sup>134</sup> Again the town was severely attacked by cholera in 1762 which took a toll of 50,000 “blacks” and 800 “Europeans”.<sup>135</sup>

Often such a public health was the result of “almost necessary consequence of climate, aided by madly unsuitable style of living fashion.”<sup>136</sup> Hence, the epidemic could

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133. H. B. Hyde, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-43.

134. *F. W. I. H.* Vol. 2. Letter to the Court dated 22.8.1757. para. 2.

135. Henry Cotton, *Calcutta: Old and New ...* (Calcutta, 1907), p. 83.

136. H. E. Busteed, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

not be checked permanently. Again in 1766, "a fatal mortality prevailed amongst the troops which were detained in Calcutta." Three brigades of troops were reported to be lost in only two seasons.<sup>137</sup> Calcutta with the entire country was attacked by epidemic in the very next year. The Directors were informed that "The general return of the troops will inform you how many gallant men, both officers and soldiers, fell untimely sacrifices to its fury."<sup>138</sup> The Company's officials in the town were so frightened that they decided to send their incoming troops to Kashimbazar.<sup>139</sup>

Bad weather was often accompanied by famines. "Famines were also frequent and frightfully destructive. One which extended over 1770 and 1771 was the most terrible in its consequences, but others of shorter duration occasioned unspeakable suffering."<sup>140</sup> Calcutta was again severely hit by epidemics as well as famines in the 1780s. Huge loss of population was recorded in 1785-84 due to the "epidemical disorder."<sup>141</sup> There was precautionary arrangement in 1788 by which the inhabitants were asked to stay within the town.<sup>142</sup> But that too failed to check the huge casualty caused by the outbreak of small pox in the very next year.<sup>143</sup>

As the expenditure towards the municipal services was low, it is unfair to expect a public health better than this

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137. R. Sen, *Calcutta in the 18th Century* (Calcutta, 1985), p. 23.

138. *Selections*. No. 935.

139. *Selections*. No. 968.

140. W. H. Carey, *The Good Old Days of Hon'ble John Company*. (Calcutta Reprint, 1980), ed. by N. R. Ray, p. 62.

141. *B. O. Misc. Progs.* 18.5.1787.

142. W. H. Carey, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

143. W. S. Seton-Karr, *Selections from Calcutta Gazette*, vol. II. p. 200.

in Calcutta.<sup>144</sup> One of the major reasons of these was the non-availability of good potable water. It was reported even in 1835 that the most part of the year the river water could not be used.<sup>145</sup> And the areas inhabited by the Indians suffered most badly due to the shortage of well during those days.<sup>146</sup> It was reported in 1849 that, "the best drinking water in Calcutta is not good ... So far as we know, the best correction of the Calcutta water is charcoal made from the wood of the Babul tree."<sup>147</sup> Another reason of nuisance was the Maratha Ditch. It was incomplete and during the major part of the period under study, water remained stagnated in places. For that it "was simply an open sewer, and the river-banks were strewn with dead-bodies of men and animals." These created the malarial jungles in and around the town.<sup>148</sup> As the general populace lived mostly in mud huts they were too prone to so many diseases.<sup>149</sup>

Unfortunately, hospitals were scarce. The Directors were too much frugal to spending money towards the improvement of public health. In their letter to the Directors dated, 12th February 1771, the Council at Calcutta clearly stated that they "have ever aimed at economy (sic) in the disbursement of this Presidency."<sup>150</sup> But they failed to satisfy the Directors. The Directors in their letter to the local authority expressed dissatisfaction because the "Indents for Medicine are extraordinarily large in every instance and appear very remarkably so when compared

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144. W. H. Carry. *op. cit.* p. 324.

145. *Fever Hospital Progs.* printed, vol. I. p. 17.

146. *Ibid.*

147. Quoted from "Calcutta Review" in *Calcutta ; People and Empire* ... introduction by N. S. Bose. (Calcutta, 1975) p. 118.

148. Henry Cotton, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-4.

149. R. Sen, *op. cit.* pp. 26-7.

150. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 6. Letter to the Court, dated 12.2.1771, para, 48.

with the consumption at most of the Capital Hospitals in London.”<sup>151</sup> So in April 1785, they considerably reduced the annual expenditure towards the maintenance of the hospital in Calcutta.<sup>152</sup> But the hospital was not for the treatment of the Indians. In the year of 1794, “native” hospital was founded by public subscriptions, in which the Company had agreed to remit a monthly subscription of Rs. 600.<sup>153</sup>

Still Calcutta gave shelter to a large number of fortune-seekers. It also became the asylum of vagabands of different types. The government’s concern for their, especially of European sailors’ infiltration was expressed as far back as 1767. The Company’s decision to “apprehend” them and to send them back to Europe were most probably not successful.<sup>154</sup> Immediately after the famine of 1770, the population of Calcutta increased very sharply.<sup>155</sup> A large number of people came from rural Bengal to find their livelihood in Calcutta. They were the reasons for crowd and lawlessness in the town.<sup>156</sup>

But what was the actual number of persons living in Calcutta? In absence of any official statistics one is to depend on the observations made by different persons from time to time. Firminger tells us that between 1690 and 1698, the town registered an increase from 15,000 to

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- 151. *General Letters from the Court of Directors, Revenue. Mss.* dated 7.4.1773. para. 6.
  - 152. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 9. Letter from the Court, dated 11.4.1785, Enclosure No. 2.
  - 153. *F. W. I. H.* vol. 12. Letter to the Court, dated 24.12.1794. para. 70.
  - 154. *Selections.* No. 928.
  - 155. *R. B. W. C. Progs.* typed vol. 2.11.1773.
  - 156. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 24.12.1788.

31,000.<sup>157</sup> By any standard the increase was not mean. From the revenue accounts, C. R. Wilson has drawn his figures : "in the six years, from 1703 to 1708 inclusive, Calcutta doubled itself, and that between then and 1710 it increased more than thirty five per cent. In the whole of the forty years which followed, Calcutta only increased threefold."<sup>158</sup> So if we roughly compute the figures which have been presented by Firminger and Wilson then, by 1750, the population of the town should have been nearly three lacs. Holwell computed the figures in the early part of the 1750's at 4,09,056.<sup>159</sup> But these figures seem to be absurd as Calcutta never had enough dwellings in which such a vast number of people could be accommodated. In fact, the total acreage from which the Company collected rent did not substantially increase between 1710 and 1788.<sup>160</sup> From the census record of 1866 we can know that the actual area for total dwellings were not very impressive.<sup>161</sup> It was then found that only 3,54,874 persons lived in those houses.<sup>162</sup>

The Police Committee in its report, estimated the total number as five lacs in 1800. But this figure does not seem to be tenable because scientific census methods did not grow at that time.<sup>163</sup> Probably the exact number was much less than this. In 1821, after a more accurate enumeration the total numbers were estimated at 1,79,917 but, at the same time, the Magistrates estimated the number of permanent residents at 2,30,552. That figure was derived from calculating the total number of houses and their occupants.

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157. W. K. Firminger, *Affairs of the East India Company ...* vol. I pp. lxx-vi.

158. C. R. Wilson, *The Early Annals*, etc. vol. I. p. 192.

159. Holwell, *India Tracts*, p. 210.

160. C. R. Wilson, *The Early Annals* etc. vol. I. p. 191.

161. *Census Report of Calcutta, 1866* (Calcutta, 1866), p. 13.

162. *Ibid.*

163. D. and B. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.* p. 234.

But the same Magistrates once found the number to be only 2,05,600 by employing a different method.<sup>164</sup>

## 9. Conclusion.

It is a fact, that during the second half of the eighteenth century, Calcutta underwent a 'metamorphosis'. The political and administrative changes in this country considerably enhanced the status of Calcutta. People in increasing number came to Calcutta regularly. The battle of the East India Company against its enemies also contributed to that process.<sup>165</sup> Calcutta became the centre for manoeuvre. Because of this, people had a natural impulse to come to Calcutta. Moreover, the lack of employment in the countryside was a recurring problem which was also aggravated by the natural disasters. To cope with this public funding for civic arrangement was needed. But it was chiefly a private initiative to develop the town as the rich property-owners always looked for best return for their investments. The chief attraction of the rich landowners was the possession of slum properties and to house there their men of choice. Since their constructions involved little resource and without any municipal restrictions the number of slums increased. Hence the fate of the town was sealed.

Moreover, the town hardly presented a healthy atmosphere for habitation. Not only was its climate bad, its sanitation were also horrible. In his letter from Calcutta dated, 13th December 1779, William Mackintosh wrote "that from the western extremity of California in America to the eastern coast of Japan, there is not a spot where

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164. The Government of Bengal, *Selections from the Records of the Government of Bengal*, vol. III, pp. 2-3.

165. It was said that after the sack of Chandernagore by Clive in March, 1757, a large number of people fled from that place to Calcutta. See S. C. Hill, *op. cit.* vol. II. No. 308.

judgement, taste, decency, and conveniency, are so grossly insulted as in that scattered and confused chaos of houses, huts, sheds, streets, lanes, alleys, windings, gutters, sinks, and tanks, which jumbled into an undistinguished mass of filth and corruption, equally offensive to human sense and health, compose the capital of English company's government in India."<sup>166</sup> Unless there were some municipal care-taking a town could not take shape. In Calcutta, neither the government had any urge to develop the settlement nor did the residents show any sense of love for the place. People could not be expected to live in such a town "in whose streets dead animals were to be seen purifying, and sometimes even human beings."<sup>167</sup> Mrs. Fay noticed that even deadbodies were thrown into the river by the poor.<sup>168</sup> In view of these it was not expected that Calcutta should grow into a perfect urban centre. In spite of this there is a tendency among historians to exaggerate the process of urbanisation available in Calcutta about this time. They are moved by external facets of urbanisation. Internally the town seemed to be a centre of closing animation.

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166. P. T. Nair. *Calcutta in 18th Century*, (Calcutta, 1984), p. 181.

167. Long, *Calcutta and its Neighbourhood ...* (Calcutta, 1974), ed. by S. Sengupta, p. 71.

168. P. T. Nair, *op. cit.* p. 205.

## THE SPRAWLING SUBURBS

Now we may turn toward the suburbs of a colonial town. It is very difficult to trace the history of the origin of Calcutta's suburbs. The economic activities of the suburbs had started much before those of the town itself. This began with the sea-trade in this region by the Portuguese in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> Since then Chitpur, a northern suburb of the town had been humming with business. The long existence of the army cantonments in that region was also a reason of importance of that place. Moreover, in the neighbourhood of the town, gun-carriages were used to be made by indigenous artisans. Probably for this the Company decided to start its factory at Kasipur in the close proximity of Chitpur in 1815.<sup>2</sup> It was expected at all quarters from the beginning that with the gradual growth and expansion of Calcutta, the suburbs around it would gain importance.

1. *The extent of the suburbs.*

Here the suburbs of Calcutta were Panchwangaon or the 15 *Dihis*. It had a special importance to the Company for long. Before 1717, the English had been in possession of Sutanuti, Calcutta and Gobindapur. This area extended from the present site of the New Fort to Harinath Dewan's

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1. O. R. Wilson, *Early Annals of the English in Bengal*, vol. I. pp. 133-34.
  2. H. R. Ghosal, *Economic Transition in the Bengal Presidency*. (Patna, 1950), pp. 116-17.



Ghat on the north-east of the present Hatkhola. The last-named place was bounded on the east by the road which now moved from Chitpur bridge to the Esplanade.<sup>3</sup> In that year, the Company was able to secure a "permission to purchase from the zamindars thirtyeight riparian villages on both banks of the Hooghly, extending to a distance of ten miles from their factory."<sup>4</sup> A. K. Ray says that the intention of the Company was to secure "the full powers of a zamindar." This also meant that the Company wanted to have its factory secured by extending areas under its authority. Holwell informs us that in June of 1746, the Company bought Banian Pooker (Baniapukur), Puggladanga (Pagladanga), Tenggra and Dullond (Dalandha) under the general head of John Naggore.<sup>5</sup> Holwell rented Simla, a *dih*, contiguous to the 15 *Dihis* and, that was advantageous to the Company.<sup>6</sup> Simla was largely inhabited by the weavers.<sup>7</sup> Pagladanga in the eastern part of the 15 *Dihis* had already acquired importance even by 1754. Pagladanga was a port for the goods brought from the eastern Bengal to Calcutta. Since the place assumed importance Holwell purchased Makunda and Kulia adjoining to Pagladanga along with Simla.<sup>8</sup> By this way he prevented any outside-interference there.

When the Maratha Ditch was dug the natural boundaries of the town in the north and north-east more or less took shape. Soon after the battle of Palasi, the Company decided to use the Salt Water Lake in the east of the town as a line of defence against any country enemy.<sup>9</sup> This line

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3. *Home (Public) Progs.* 16.11.1787.

4. A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* p. 50.

5. J. Z Holwell, *India Tracts*, pp. 238-39.

6. *Selections*, No. 139.

7. Binayakrishna Deb, *op. cit.* p. 52.

8. *Home (Public) Progs.* 8.8.1754.

9. *Selections*, No. 244.

was contemplated to move up to Kulpi in the south of the 24-Parganas.

Initially the Collector of Calcutta was entrusted with the revenues of the 15 *Dihis*. Then the magisterial power was given to him in 1790.<sup>10</sup> It was the desire of the Company for long to retain the suburbs in the immediate vicinity of the original accupation in its own hands. Though it had purchased some of the villages which had been a part of the *Dihis*, the grant of *zamindari* by Mir Jafar immediately after the battle of Palasi removed all obstacles in retaining and administering those places.<sup>11</sup>

Now what comprised those 15 *Dihis* ? There are a lot of confusion in identifying those *Dihis*. Rev. Long presents an account of 'hustabood' of 14 *Dihis* (or 59 villages) for the years of 1765 to 1767.<sup>12</sup> The confusion regarding the exact area and names of the *dihis* prevailed when we rely on a list presented by A. K. Ray. Here we get Bagzola in the north of the town near Chitpur and Pykepara and Sealdah in the east of the town as two different *dihis*.<sup>13</sup> The official list is much different from these.

The Collector of Calcutta once in a letter to the Board of Revenue maintained that Panchwangaon (or 55 villages)

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10. B. O. R. (*Judicial Progs.* 12.7.1790.

11. H. Verelst, *A View of the Rise, Progress and the Present State of the English Government in Bengal*. (London, 1772). Appendix No. XLV. In the list the following *mouzas* were included, *Kerria Kismat* of Dhulland (Dhalanda ?), *Kerria Kismut* of Bharee Birjhee (Bahir Birji ?), *Kerria Kismut* of Bharee Serampoor (Bahir Srirampur ?), *Kerria Salduah* (Sealdah ?), *Kerria Kismut* of Deccan Paikpara (Dakshin Paikpara ?).

12. *Selections*. No. 856.

13. A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* pp. 111-12.

were divided into 14 *Dihis* with one village as extra called, Pykepara. Accordingly, the *Dihis* were.<sup>14</sup>

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1.	<i>Dih</i> i Monohurpur	including	5	villages.
2.	„ Serampur	„	4	„
3.	„ Tupsia	„	4	„
4.	„ Bahir Simla	„	4	„
5.	„ Sinthi	}	6	„
6.	„ Chitpur			
7.	„ Dakshin	„	5	„
	Pyakepara			
8.	„ Soora	„	2	„
9.	„ Birjee	„	4	„
10.	„ Ultadanga	„	8	„
11.	„ Kulia	„	5	„
12.	„ Entally	„	4	„
14.	„ Chakraberia	}	4	„
13.	„ Bhowanipur			

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Here we get only 14 *Dihis* which included a total of 55 villages. But there was another village namely Birpara as referred to in this very letter. We have earlier got the name of Pykepara which was absent here though Birapara and Pykepara are still too close to be identified separately.

Whatever might have been the exact names and individual boundaries of those *dihis*, it is clear that they roughly encircled the town in its three directions barring the west where the river was treated as the natural boundary.

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14. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 6.10.1790. The letter from the Collector dated 15.9.1790.

2. *Suburbs as the rural vicinity of town.*

Because of the growth of political and administrative importance of Calcutta, the pressure of population was felt on land in the town. The people who could not settle within the limits of Calcutta, had to be shifted to its vicinity. Hence, with the town itself, 15 *Dihis* also felt the population pressure. It was reported in 1788 by the Assistant Collector of Calcutta that, the value of land in these areas was such that the people indulged in grabbing the land of their neighbours.<sup>15</sup> One of the major reasons for the population growth in the *dihis* was the effect of the "Bye Laws". For the operation of the said law, all the stave huts were to be removed from the town proper.<sup>16</sup> A large number of people were suddenly thrown out of their homes. Another reason was the restrictions ordered by the Company. The Europeans were only allowed to go ten miles beyond the limits of the town without having any prior permission from the authority. This factor also helped towards the concentration of the Europeans in the *dihis*. The well-to-do Europeans as a matter of taste did not prefer to live within the town. They usually preferred to live in the outskirts of the town and in the garden-houses. The concentration of Europeans in the *dihis* started immediately with the grant of *Diwani* to the Company in 1765.<sup>17</sup>

Certain other factors also contributed to such a process. As the *dihis* were the rear areas of the town they were free from certain types of taxes and duties which were then prevalent in Calcutta. As the *dihis* were not under the jurisdiction of the police of the town the inhabitants there, were

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15. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 27.6.1788.

16. C. O. R. Progs. 3.10.1782.

17. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. typed vol. 15.5.1780.

usually free from certain restrictions as well as from the *chowkedarry* tax. The absence of a well-defined boundary of the town often helped the farmers of the 15 *Dihis* to try "from time to time ... to cut off South East Corner of the town & thereby to withdraw it from the jurisdiction of the Court and from the payment of the Calcutta taxes."<sup>18</sup>

But the *dihis* were totally rural in character. The fact that the Europeans and rich Indians preferred to retain their garden-houses in the suburbs was a principal reason behind such rural nature of the *dihis*. Moreover these places were the source of constant supplies of vegetables, fish and other food stuff to the town. The major concentration of the Europeans were in *Dihi Birjee* i.e., beyond the Chowringhee in the south and then *Dihi Entally* i.e., beyond Sealdah and Paliaghat in the east. A large number of new buildings were built by them particularly in former locality. Vansittart took out *patta* for huge amount of land. The gardens of the Indians were chiefly located in *Dihi Birjee* and in *Ultadanga* in the north-east of the suburbs.<sup>19</sup> Not only the garden-houses were built, often these people used to farm huge lands in the *dihis*. Probably this was for agricultural purposes. Here also the Indians and non-Indians alike took interest. Once entire Bagzola in the north of Chitpur belonged to Coja Arraton, the son of the famous Armenian merchant, Coja Petroose.<sup>20</sup> He also took into farm the two neighbouring villages namely, Satgachi and Jeypur. Similarly, one Reverend M. Johnson on 19th July, 1775, applied to the Calcutta Committee of Revenue for farming the lands in Chitpur. A vast tract had by then been vacated by the army camps of the Company there. He offered to farm them as he thought "the cultivation of land in this country may be advan-

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18. *Home (Public) Progs.* 16.11.1787.

19. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 6.10.1790.

20. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 8.3.1779.

tageous in the Hands of the Europeans.”<sup>21</sup> Here also the purpose of farming was solely agricultural. He was however not allowed.

### 3. *Suburbs as suppliers of bricks etc.*

As the concentration of population in the town and its nearby areas gained momentum it was expected that the demand for houses also increased. Since the residents of Calcutta were not accustomed to use the river-silt for the brick-manufacture the number of brick-built houses in Calcutta was not high. Yet the requirement for bricks however meagre, had to be fulfilled. As the river-silt failed to be a popular ingredient in the manufacture of bricks the people had to dig land in making them. When the population started increasing in Calcutta it was obvious that prices of land would also rise. So no one was likely to manufacture brick by digging his own land within the town. Moreover there was an official ban on such manufacture within the close vicinity of the town. Hence the 15 *Dihis* were of great help to the house-builders. It was complained on 8th April 1778, that the *ryots* of Etally usually dug the soil to make bricks. This indiscriminate practice caused health hazards. For those deep holes caused out of digging became filled with rain-water during the rainy season.<sup>22</sup>

The entire 15 *Dihis* were utilised by the brick manufacturers. Though the supply of bricks never matched the demands, it was reported that since 1758-59 a large tract measuring 404 *bighas* 16 *cottahs* of land in Dhapa Maunpur in the village of Dakshindarry, a northern suburb near Pykepara, remained waste till 1781-82. There people usually went to dig land.<sup>23</sup>

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21. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 24.7.1775.

22. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 20.4.1778.

23. *C. O. R. Progs.* 20.3.1783.

It is unfair to conclude that only random and illegal digging was conducted here and there around Calcutta. Often the residents of the town had their personal lands in the *dihis* for occasional manufacture of bricks.<sup>24</sup> The indiscriminate land digging by any one meant a loss in the value of land and ultimately loss of revenue which would not be liked by the Company. So the farmer of the *dihis* for the year 1779-80 had to furnish undertaking for not burning bricks in the *dihis*. In return he demanded a power to take action against those who would undertake illegal burning of bricks.<sup>25</sup> To prevent this practice ultimately a police regulation was issued in 1780. The burning of bricks and lime was prohibited within two miles from the town.<sup>26</sup> It is very difficult to say whether this regulation was strictly adhered to because one Jagannath Sarkar had his own lands near the Esplanade and behind the soldiers' burial ground where he burnt bricks even in 1787.<sup>27</sup>

The residents of the town also depended on the *dihis* for supplies of timber. We find that a type of ground below the high water mark called, *Gungapatteh* ground was let out to the timber-merchants who probably supplied timbers to the town.<sup>28</sup> When felling of trees was prohibited in and around Calcutta this was one way of ensuring a regulated supply of timber to the town. Such regulated supply meant that timber was not available in plenty.

#### 4. Administration.

The importance of the 15 *Dihis* to the Company's government had already been discussed. By securing the

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24. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 16.12.1779.

25. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 2.12.1779.

26. B. B. Misra, *The Judicial Administration of the East India Company in Bengal*. p. 350.

27. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 27.4.1787.

28. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 24.6.1784.

grant of *zamindari* of 24-Parganas from the Nawab of Bengal, the Company extended its sphere of influence in the neighbouring areas of the town and tightened the grip of its authority there. After 1757 and by 1787, the town was reported to have extended somehow towards the east by keeping Bagbazar as northern and Gobindapur as southern limits. The extension was possible by annexing Chowringhee, Hoggulcoory, Arcooli, a part of Simla, a part of Mirjapur, a part of Molunga, a part of Etally and a part of Colimba.<sup>29</sup> But beyond those limits the Company's government did never try to extend the town. Hence, the boundaries of the suburb for years together remained more or less the same.

By acquiring the *zamindari* of the 24-Parganas the Company immediately removed all the *zamindars* and took the reins of administration in its own hands. The fate of 15 *Dihis* was also same. The principal aim towards this decision was to enhance the revenues of those areas. At a later date, the *zamindars* of the Parganas were reinstated but, the Company did not restore the *dihis* to the *zamindars* from whom it had bought the *dihis*. The administration of the *dihis* was entrusted to the Collector of Calcutta and, he in turn appointed farmers or *ijaradars* to collect the revenues on his behalf. However the Company succeeded in bringing both the town and the *dihis* under one single umbrella of revenue administration.<sup>30</sup> In this way the Company tried to maintain its authority with perfect administrative harmony. But it did never try for any general improvement of the suburbs. It had directly assumed the role of the revenue-collector but, it did not shoulder the responsibilities in maintaining law and order.

Absence of a regular police invited a lot of problems. It was observed in the official quarters that the *dihis* were

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29. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 22.6.1787

30. R. B. W. C. Progs. typed vol. 17.12.1773.



the shelters for the criminals of the town. By committing some crimes in the town anybody could sneak easily into the neighbouring areas. The absence of a well defined border and regular patrol in the said border helped those criminals to a great extent.

One of the primary reasons for the assemblage of the criminals in the *dihis* was the presence of a large number of "arrack" shops in these places. The "arrack" farmer was allowed to issue licence to the retailers in lieu of a certain *jumma*. There was no fixed limit for the numbers of such retailers' shops. Hence the number might have been innumerable. Those shops in the *dihis* were kept open usually till 9 in the evening while those were to be closed by the sun-set in the town. Those shops were the source of so many problems. Often it was complained that the farmer of the *dihis* gave permissions by flouting the prohibitory restrictions. For this the people drank indiscriminately and then indulged in series of violence.<sup>31</sup> Not only did the local residents indulge in several types of crimes Europeans also were a part of the same game of self-indulgence. The number of illegal shops probably surpassed those of the legal. The matter was so grave that the Governor General in Council ordered the closure of all the "spirituous liquor" shops in the town and in the *dihis* from 23rd September 1782.<sup>32</sup> But that order failed to bring the desirable results. Probably the Company did not take the matter so seriously. Even in 1791, it was detected that the liquor shops afforded a place of resort to the "low Europeans beyond the Reach of the Police". Hence, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Police in Calcutta, those were again ordered to be closed by the sun-set.<sup>33</sup> But the matter did not end here. The police chief thought from

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31. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* typed vol. 18.12.1778.

32. *C. O. R. Progs.* 29.8.1782.

33. *B. O. R. (Sayer) Progs.* 7.12.1791.

his own point of view as he was to deal with the law and order of the town. The government's hunger for revenue was great. The restriction on the liquor shops meant the shrinkage of a big and an assured source of income. So for "Augmenting the Revenue" from "Arrack" it was decided to introduce "many traders in the article to settle beyond the Limits" of the town.<sup>34</sup>

When it was an official policy not to check people getting into the habit of being drunk, maintenance of law and order became a serious issue. Moreover, the people failed to get proper occupation in the town. So a very good section of those unemployed people remained unsatisfied. The problem snowballed into such a proportion that once the *foujdar* of Chitpur, a northern suburb, pleaded helplessness in the face of criminals. Chitpur was notorious for giving shelter to criminals. But no one could be apprehended because the villagers seldom came out to give evidence against a robber. To break the stronghold of the criminals the *foujdar* there proposed to set up a police station at Chitpur<sup>35</sup> But that was not conceded.

##### 5 *Revenue structure.*

The chief administrative function of the Company in the 15 *Dihis* was the collection of revenue. But initially, the Company was not satisfied with the collections and this was expressed by Clive soon after the battle of Palasi.<sup>36</sup> The Company took the reins of administration in 1758-59 by removing all the age-old *zamindars* in the *dihis*<sup>37</sup> with an anticipation for a fat income from the *dihis*.

The revenue of the *dihis* were usually collected on cer-

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34. *F. W. I. H.* vol. XII. Letter to the Court, dated 18.8.1794. para. 40.

35. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 6.3.1780.

36. W. K. Firminger, *Affairs of the E. I. Company*, vol. I. p. xevii.

37. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 1.7.1778.

tain heads. The principal among them were land rent including garden-rents, the *Sayer* Pagladanga, Rajabazar and Suri Bazar. The Company was always suspicious that the Indians did not disclose the actual amount of land under their individual possessions. For this the regular measurement of the lands and the practice of granting *pattas* after such measurements were introduced. During the said period, there took place as many as three measurements. The first one was conducted soon after the battle of Palasi, in 1758-1759; then in 1764-65 and finally in 1781-82. The *pattas* of the holdings were first issued in 1763-64 and then again in 1774-75.<sup>38</sup> It was a rule that every lawful holder of land should have a *patta* in support of the said possession. Moreover, the presence of *patta* could easily remove the possible evasions of dues. A defaulter's *patta* could be confiscated and his land could be put on sale for the recovery of rents.

The total amount of the *malguzari* land in the 15 *Dihis* was 26,803 *bighas* 7 *cottah* and 10 *chittacks*. The said amount later increased up to 31,547 *bighas* 18 *cottah* and 6 *chittacks*. By including various types of *baze zamin*, the said amount reached up to 43,305 *bighas* 2 *cottah* and 10 *chittacks*.<sup>39</sup> These figures prove the endeavours of the Company to bring as much land as possible under tenancy. When its zeal to raise the revenue was so much explicit, it is expected that it also maintained an equal interest in bringing the untenanted lands under farm. For this the government conducted regular measurements to find out unassessed lands to put those under tenancy.

But there were always troubles relating to the possessions of land. The *ryots* were usually not satisfied with the official arrangements regarding their holdings. When the *patta* was treated as the sole document of ownership of

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38. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 29.4.1788.

39. *Ibid.*

properties everybody wanted to make his *patta* as perfect as possible. So the *ryots* demanded to include the "comar" lands in their *pattas*.<sup>40</sup> Their zeal towards this suggests that the *ryots* were always afraid of losing the possessions of land in prospective measurements. They were also apprehensive about the policy which was followed during the measurements and about the scale that was used in measurement.<sup>41</sup>

From such complaints the pressure on land could be understood. It was often reported that some *ryots* had been selling revenue lands to others though they had not bought them from the government and when "It is a Rule, that he who has not bought, can not sell (sic)." It was declared that no person could sell land for which *patta* had not been issued without a prior permission from the government.<sup>42</sup>

From the behaviour of the *ryots*, the Company could guess the real worth of lands. It undertook a relentless effort to trace out hidden lands and then to put them into farm. After the measurements of 1782, 4639 *bighas* and 5 *cottah* of land was detected as excess. Soon those were given in farm to the *ijaradar* for the *dihis* for an extra annual *jumma* of Rs. 1500.<sup>43</sup>

Though the Company decided to keep the 15 *Dihis* in its own hands<sup>44</sup> it did not employ its own machinery in the collection of revenues from there. The *dihis* were given to the *ijaradar* or a farmer usually on yearly basis. We do not have the earlier records of the collections. Long has supplied us reports of two years' collections. In his statis-

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40. C. O. R. Progs. 5.11.1781.

41. R. B. W. C. Progs. 30.3.1773.

42. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 11.11.1776.

43. C. O. R. Progs. 11.8.1783.

44. F. W. I. H. vol. 5. Letter to the Court, dated 14.9.1767, para. 30.

tics the net "produce" of the 14 *Dihis* or 59 villages for the years 1765-66 was *sicca* Rs. 20,643-9-9 ; this figure was increased in the very next year when the net "produce" was *sicca* Rs. 30,050-0-0.<sup>45</sup> That was the first year after the acquisition of *Diwani*.

But the expectations of the Company were usually not materialised. In 1771-72, the total *jumma* was estimated at Rs. 71,568-5-17, which was too exorbitant and the farmer failed to remit the entire amount. Hence he was removed in the next year. In the said year i.e., 1772-73, the *jumma* was estimated at a reasonable amount of Rs. 50,548-15-0.<sup>46</sup> Probably neither the farmer for the years 1771-72 nor did the government could guess the intensity of the famine which had ravaged the province in the immediately preceding year. From such a vast difference of amounts between the two years it is clear that the famine had its toll in the *dihis* too.

The Company's government however, had no time in dealing with the famine. It only wanted a secured collection. It was thought that the annual farming used to create certain amount of administrative uncertainty. To avoid that, it was decided to let the *dihis* to a single farmer for a term of five years. This was a part of Hastings' Five Yearly Farming system. Ultimately, one Baburam Ray was appointed farmer for four years with effect from the year 1773-74. Roughly he was to pay something more than rupees forty five thousands.<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, the annual *jumma* as arranged with Baburam was much lower than what had been paid in the previous years. Probably the Company was dissatisfied with the speculators who used to farm the *dihis*, then pleading exorbitant *jumma* finally failed to remit the money. It wanted to have a

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45. *Selections*. No. 856.

46. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 19.6.1777.

47. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 29.1.1778.

secured *jumma* which would safely come after a stipulated time. To get rid of this problem of default the Company made it clear that the farmer of the *dihis* must be an inhabitant of the area.<sup>48</sup> The intention of the Company could be understood. In case of default, the Company could easily attach the immovable properties of the farmer to recover the amount. But farmer after farmer in default, pleaded helplessness in the collection of garden rents. Majority of the Europeans seldom cleared their dues in time. To solve this recurring problem, it was ultimately decided to relieve the farmer from the collection of garden-rents.

Each *ryot* was given *patta* against a *patta-selami* and *rasam*. In 1763-64 the total demand on both these accounts had been fixed at Rs. 2-4-0 for each *patta*. Out of this amount *patta-selami* accounted for Re. 1-4-0 and *rasam* Re. 1-0-0. But in 1774-75, this arrangement was changed to help the small holders. In the new arrangement the demands were progressively increasing in the case of big holders.<sup>49</sup> Those were demanded on the basis of the total amount of land as shown in the following table.<sup>50</sup>

Area	Selami	Rasam	Total
1- 5 <i>cottah</i>	Re. 1-4-0	Re. 0-8-0	Re. 1-12-0
6-10     ,,	1-4-0	1-0-0	2- 4-0
11-15     ,,	1-4-0	1-8-0	2-12-0
16 <i>cottah</i> and onwards	1-4-0	2-0-0	3- 4-0

Besides the land rent and allied taxes, there were several other sources. It was reported in 1778, that there were as many as eight '*mahals*' in the 15 *Dihis* which included Beltala, Garia, Uttarpara, Bahir Simla, *Mangun* (or *Goody*

48. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 28.7.1777.

49. C. O. R. Progs. 14.12.1784.

50. *Ibid.*

*Mangun*, a duty levied on the repairing of boats), *Gusaga patta* (or a duty arising from the fisheries), *Ganja mahal* and *Baliaghata*.<sup>51</sup> It is difficult to say how much amounts were collected in a year from these sources and actually how much was charged in each head of such '*mahals*'. But it is clear that majority of the '*mahals*' were of entry tax and those were named in accordance with the place-names. A large variety of goods were to be imported into Calcutta and those were chiefly brought through Beltala, Garia, Baliaghata etc. Since the demands in Calcutta were considerable it is expected that the collections at those points were good.

#### 6. *Gardens and garden-rents.*

We have already mentioned that the *dihis* attracted a large number of Europeans to settle there. They usually built their garden-houses in the *dihis*. They were followed by rich Indians. Though once it was reported that these gardens constituted nearly half of the total land in the *dihis*,<sup>52</sup> it was not true. In 1778-79, the garden-rents amounted to Rs. 5095-7-3.<sup>53</sup> In 1786, the amount fell and it was only Rs. 3615-0-2-8.<sup>54</sup> From these figures it would be wrong to conclude that the number of gardeners fell leading to the fall in the amount of collection. The Europeans did not remit their dues very often leading to an accumulation of arrears and ultimately resulting to a fall in the actual *jumma*.

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51. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* typed vol. 25.8.1778.

52. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 27.1.1789.

53. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 17.6.1778.

54. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 23.6.1786. Probably the amount like those collected under other revenue heads varied. In a letter dated 3rd March 1787, the Collector mentioned to the Board that the Garden-rents amounted to Rs. 3644-15-14 for the year. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 20.3.1787.

Following the Europeans the Indians who owned gardens also refused to remit their respective dues. Nearly all of those defaulters had high connections. Having been repeatedly failed to collect money from those persons the farmer lodged complaints against them. Between 1773-74 and 1776-77 the balance due to "Gentlemen's Gardens" or of the Europeans' amounted to Rs. 12,828-1-1.<sup>55</sup> Consequently the farmer fell into arrear. To avoid imprisonment etc. he fled to Baranagore, than a Dutch settlement.<sup>56</sup> The government could appreciate the intensity of the problem. The farmer was not empowered to take action against the defaulting Europeans. Ultimately, the Company's government forced to employ its own men to collect the dues from the owners of the gardens. But now its colonial nature of administration became clearly exposed. For the non-payment of their garden-rents, the Indians were confined in the *katcharry* and their respective gardens were confiscated.<sup>57</sup> But there was no such provision to force the Europeans to clear their dues.

Hence balance on this head increased year after year. All types of persuasions to these people to remit their dues came to a naught. Ultimately, the practice of distress-sale came into being to recover the balance.<sup>58</sup> The Company did not prefer the presence of gardens in such a large number there. Then it was made a rule in the *dihis* that the rent would be raised when a *ryoty* land was converted into a garden land.<sup>59</sup>

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55. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 23.7.1777.

56. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 7.8.1778.

57. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 13.9.1775.

58. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 8.3.1793.

59. *C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 31.3.1785. The Collector of Calcutta in his letter dated 30th March 1785, to the Committee wrote that "It is the custom in Paunchawongong to raise the Rent of "Reiatty Ground when transferred and made Garden Ground ..... to 3 Rupees a Begah."



## Places of Interest

7. *Chitpur.*

Chitpur was roughly the northern limit of the suburbs. It included four villages namely, Chitpur, Tala, Beerpara and Kalidaha. All of them still exist in the same names. Not only was the place then famous as an important centre of Hindu pilgrimage because it had the temple of Chitreswari Kali situated there (where according to myth, human sacrifices were conducted) but also, as a place of trade and military establishment. From the regular complaints of lawlessness which we have already mentioned, the population concentration and its nature in this particular place can be easily understood. This place was also treated as a demarcating zone with the Dutch settlement at Baranagore in the north of it.

As Chitpur was facing the river in its west, it had a topographic advantage to grow up as a trade centre. A large number of salt *golahs* or godowns were situated there. Salt from Hijli and Mahisadal in Midnapur and, from 24-Parganas were regularly brought here.<sup>60</sup> With the grant of important salt producing areas just around Calcutta in 1757, the importance of Chitpur further enhanced. The Company had a large investment in the salt trade and after the embargo put on the import of Madras salt, the local trade assumed a greater vigour.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly, Chitpur was a military cantonment for a long time. The entire area marked as Chitpur cantonment consisted of 755 *bighas* 3 *cottah* of land, and covering Birpara, Satgachi, Bagzola, Dakshin Pykepara and even Ultadanga.<sup>62</sup> Soon after the battle at Palasi, the English

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60. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 27.9.1776.

61. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 7.11.1775.

62. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 27.7.1775.

decided to shift the army cantonment from Chitpur to Dum Dum. To facilitate the army movements a well-built road from Chitpur to Dum Dum was also planned by Clive.<sup>63</sup>

Though Chitpur commanded importance as a strategic place the Company was not ready to allow it to flourish as independent of the town. Md. Reza Khan had a big *zamin-dary* at Chitpur and considering his position and influence it was obvious that the Company did not prefer a well-developed fiefdom under him. The place did not have even regular market. In a petition, Reza Khan also complained of it. He proposed to erect a market on his own land. Though he was allowed to hold the said market, that could barely flourish due to the presence of the government customs house at Kashipur and for several regulations. This customs house was said to be a hindrance towards the free movement of the goods.<sup>64</sup>

When the army cantonment was shifted from Chitpur it was then decided to let it out. One Reverend Johnson proposed to farm the entire land at the rate of 6 annas per *bigha*. He proposed to develop the entire area for which a low term was offered. The Calcutta Committee of Revenue thought that the rate should be at least 8 annas instead of 6.<sup>65</sup> But the president of the Committee opposed this arrangement. According to him the value of land in Calcutta had considerably increased in the recent past. As the lands of the said cantonment were very close to the town itself, their value should be the same like Calcutta. This was a very important piece of observation. The president thought that the acceptance of Johnson's offer meant that the annual collection would be only Rs. 820. If the lands

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63. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 13.4.1780.

64. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 9.12.1777. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 12.4.1779 and 1.6.1779.

65. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 24.7.1775

were allotted to their former possessors at the existing rates of the *dihis*, the annual returns could be Rs. 2420-3-19. And for this the Company should make "a small advance of Tagavee (tagavi) to the Ryotts, whether the Ryotts who have been removed from this Land to make way for the Cantonment." Hence, Johnson's offer was rejected.<sup>66</sup>

The Company also wanted to reap maximum advantage from the growth of population in this part of the *dihis*. The necessity for the erection of a regular police station was felt by the *foujdar* of the area. But the Company was not ready to spend anything from its coffer for it. Its policy for enlarging the area by bringing in new habitations in new localities began to pay rich dividend. This was the only aim of it.

#### 8. Pagladanga.

Chitpur was the northern suburb of the town. The eastern suburb was a place named Pagladanga. From the list given by A. K. Ray, we know that Pagladanga was included in *Dihi* Entally. *Ghat* Pagladanga included Baliaghat and Noyapatty.<sup>67</sup> Baliaghat was then a chief supply point of the town. Various types of goods were usually brought from Dhaka, Chittagong and all "aurungs" of those regions through Sundarbans into Baliaghat. From there those were brought into the town by road. The major source of income was a duty of 13 *cowries* per rupee on the value of goods.<sup>68</sup> It is very difficult to trace whether the duties collected at this place were separated from those collected at *Ghat* Pagladanga. However, the increasing nature of

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66. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 27.7.1775.

67. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 9.3.1775.

68. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 21.12.1775. Here it is mentioned that Sayer Baliaghata included 12 mahals namely, *Goloy Magoon*, *Cotty Salami*, *Joy Cottah*, *Moody Connah* (duties on shops), *Noyah Sokto Coyally*, export duty on sundry goods @ 13

the goods traffic had already inspired the Company's government to extend its authority over the entire region. Moreover, there was another duty called, *Ferry Chalanta* charged on the passing boats at Pagladanga.<sup>69</sup>

That Pagladanga was a rich *ghat* can be understood from the official directives also. According to the order of the Governor General in Council all the duties collected at this *ghat* were transferred to the Collector of Calcutta.<sup>70</sup> The Indians also knew this fact and probably for this there was too much eagerness to get this *ghat* in farm. The Roy Royan was eager to farm it for himself because that would enhance his prestige in the eyes of his fellow countrymen.<sup>71</sup>

The importance of this *ghat* was such that the Collector of Calcutta was asked to repair the roads from the *Ghats* Pagladanga and Balia to Calcutta. For this a toll was proposed on the goods traffic there though the road-duty had already been abolished.<sup>72</sup> Probably that was the only public work undertaken by the Company in the *dihis*.

Initially the goods passing through Pagladanga and Baliaghat in their way to the town were not taxed at those places. The duty was levied only when the goods were sold there. But this practice created a lot of problems. A fraud

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*cowries* per rupee *Mooty, Moody Connah* on the roads, *Tehbazaree*, Arrak, Bhang. *Ghat* Pagladanga as a separate farm included 16 *mahals* namely, *Fish mahal, Mater, Crabs Doongah, Goloy Magoon, Magoon, Cooty Salami Jay Cottah, Moody Connah, Coyally, Noyah Sokto, Tehbazaree*, export duty on sundry goods @ 13 *cowries* per rupee—*Mockaltolah Fish mahal, Mooty, Arrak, Bhang*.

69. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 14.12.1775.

70. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 9.12.1788.

71. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 11.3.1776 and 25.3.1776.

72. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 6.5.1788. There was an "agitation to make a road to Pagladanga at the public expense."

could be easily committed by the traders. To put a stop to this practice, it was made clear that those goods would pass those *ghats* duty-free if and when transported from there direct to Calcutta. The duty would be levied on those goods when deposited at the godowns there.<sup>73</sup>

Calcutta's dependence on those two *ghats* increased gradually. The Company engaged some merchants for bringing firewood for public use through these *ghats*. Once it was complained by the importers that the farmer of the *ghats* insisted on the payment of duties. He had actually collected some. On 7th May 1778, the Calcutta Committee of Revenue directed the said farmer to refund the amounts to the merchants from whom the duties had been collected.<sup>74</sup> Subsequently, the farmer was again specifically reminded not to collect any duty on goods meant for the Company's use in Calcutta.<sup>75</sup>

Like firewood, *chunam* or lime was imported at those two *ghats*. Lime was then one of the major building materials. All the items were charged by the government. The lime-marchants agitated for the abolition of duties. On 2nd May 1788, the Collector of the town proposed such abolition. He mentioned that due to heavy fraud allegedly committed by the farmer of the *ghats*, the government's gain was very nominal. Ultimately, it was decided to abolish duties on lime which were specifically bound for Calcutta.<sup>76</sup>

With the passing of time one thing had become clear. An article was allowed to pass duty-free through those *ghats* when it was proved that the same was for sole consumption in the town. Hence the Company's eagerness to

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73. *Ibid.*

74. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 26.1.1779.

75. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 13.1.1780.

76. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs. for Lower Provinces.* 6.5.1788.

check the price-line in the town itself was vindicated. There is another instance in support of the Company's such action. Usually 9 rupees were charged on each *doonga* or small boat per annum at the *ghat* Nayabad under the head of *Bhasa Jalkar Doonga*. The other duties which were usually collected at the *ghat* were Re. 1 and 8 annas, Re. 1 and 2 annas and 12 annas from three respective sizes of fishing boats. Those were paid by the importers. The purchasers had to pay 4 *pun* of *cowries* per basket of fish along with a handful of fish. It was obvious that due to these duties the prices of fish were higher in the town. As soon as Pagladanga and Nayabad were transferred to the charge of the Collector of Calcutta, all these duties were discontinued.<sup>77</sup>

Undoubtedly, both the *ghats* Pagladanga and Balia-ghat assumed importance as places of business. From the taxes called, *Modee Khona* levied on the shopkeepers of these two places annually, it may be assumed that these places were inhabited by a good number of people who ran shops.<sup>78</sup> Pagladanga was let out to a farmer for a fixed period. He was to collect the government duties and then to deposit those with the Collectorate. There was no fixed rate for such amount. Each time the person who could pledge the highest amount and could furnish a good security was awarded the office. Baliaghat was often let out by the farmer to one sub-farmer. This was called *kutkina* system.<sup>79</sup> Often this led to some disputes between the original farmer and his *kuṭkinadar* or sub-farmer.

From the amount of periodic collections at these *ghats*, one may have certain ideas about the traffic movement. The month of *Aghrahyān* to *Falgun* or the months from mid-November to mid-March were the principal months of col-

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77. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 13.12.1790.

78. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 27.11.1775.

79. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 1.4.1776.

lection.<sup>80</sup> This meant the transaction of goods in those *ghats* were heavier during the winter months. But the opening of the Tolley's Canal reduced the importance of these *ghats* considerably. The collections also fell.<sup>81</sup> The estimated *jumma* for the year 1788-89, was only Rs. 3395-15-17-2 which fell again the next year to Rs. 3332-15-3-0.<sup>82</sup> In course of time the importance of these *ghats* gradually faded and the town began to depend on other sources for its daily supplies.

### 9. Tolley's Canal.

If one carefully goes through the map of the 15 *Dihis* during the period then it becomes clear that Tolley's Canal was one of the principal arteries in the southern part of the *dihis*. Tolley was not the innovator. He had taken the Canal into farm from the Company which had already been dug by Surman long ago. Tolley deepened it and made it navigable. What he did was this : "From Kidderpore to Tardah Colonel Tolly opened out the way into the Sunderbans by connecting the Hooghly with the Bidyadhari."<sup>83</sup> No doubt, the opening of this Canal helped the easy transport of goods from the far eastern districts of Bengal to Calcutta.

In his letter dated 4th August 1779, to the Calcutta Committee of Revenue, Tolley wrote that he had opened at his own cost "a water Communication with the Eastern Provinces, Salt Water Lakes, Sunderbunds, and the Hooghly River by which means there will be an Importation of ten Thousand Fish, from those Salt Rivers—This will employ more People, ....., and the Increase of a num-

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80. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 30.3.1778.

81. Cal. C. O. R. Progs. 11.2.1778.

82. B. O. R. Misc. Progs. 24.9.1789.

83. A. K. Ray, *op. cit.* p. 205. Often Tardah is mentioned as Fardaha.

ber of Fish will decrease the Price." Not only fish, Tolley claimed that the import of firewood had also considerably increased resulting in the decline of price. Initially, Tolley had been empowered to collect two rupees on every 100 *maunds* of firewood as a duty. But that seemed to be heavy and to encourage the import he lowered the rate to one rupee.<sup>84</sup>

Tolley had taken a major initiative in making the Canal navigable. What was supposed to be done by the public effort of the Company's government, was completed by private enterprise. Before 1775, this stream was much out of use. Tolley deepened it in 1776. "The stream, 17 miles in length, extended from Kidderpore to Fardaha and so connected the Hooghly with the Bidyadhari."<sup>85</sup> So it not only helped in bringing goods into Calcutta but also to other places. Tolley once claimed that due to the opening of his Canal, fish was imported from Jessore and Khulna and "immediately exported to Chandernagore and Chinsura & c. which never was done before the opening of this new navigation."<sup>86</sup>

With the gradual growth of the movement of goods the areas adjoining the Canal became centres of trade. Tolley had a concrete policy in transforming those areas into developed localities. He wanted to see the Canal being utilised for the best of purposes. For this Canal, rice and paddy could be brought easily from as far a place as Dhaka.<sup>87</sup> In a letter to the Governor General and his Council dated 23rd September 1777, Tolley complained that *kyallee*, a type of duty on grain, was charged on some parts of the Canal beyond Calcutta. Besides that, *Paunchutra* or a levy of 5 *chittacks* per-rupee worth of grain was taken away by some

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84. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* typed vol. 4.8.1779.

85. N. Mukherjee, *op. cit.* p. 32.

86. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 16.7.1779.

87. *B. O. R. Misc. Progs.* 26.12.1786.



farmers appointed by the Company. Certainly this was not liked by Tolley nor by the traders. To help a free-movement of goods Tolley even offered to bear the financial burden : "it it is not convenient to have government duties removed from the immediate banks of the Canal I will very willingly hold myself responsible to government annually for the medium of the duties."<sup>88</sup> Probably this prayer was not granted. But Tolley received favour from the Company's government. He was allowed to occupy 2,000 *bighas* of waste land adjoining the Canal from the Salt Lake to the Surman's bridge near Kidderpur.<sup>89</sup> Tolley's Canal also started catering the need for a supply of firewood for Calcutta.

The linkage between Calcutta and the eastern provinces through Tolley's Canal appeared to be really important. Along with the growing importance of this Canal, the landing *ghats* on its banks also assumed importance. Gariahat, Chetla and Beltala were such *ghats*. The lucrative trade on these *ghats* even induced Tolley to offer to farm them all.<sup>90</sup> From the behaviours of the *ghats* and from the flourishing nature of the Canal it may be said that Calcutta depended heavily on these waterways.

#### 10 Conclusion.

The suburbs of Calcutta were in many ways the life belt of the town. They supplied goods and services to it. They surrounded the town with innumerable satellite points from which the town could draw its sustenance. In the rise of Calcutta this importance of its suburbs is seldom appreciated by historians. Suburbs of Calcutta should, therefore, be redeemed as important points of study without which Calcutta's elevation would remain as a blurred episode in the annals of urbanisation in India.

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88. *Rev. Deptt. G. G. in C. Progs.* 3.10.1777.

89. *Cal. C. O. R. Progs.* 15.5.1777.

90. *Ibid.*

## CONCLUSION

From what has been said above it is clear that the process of urbanisation in Calcutta during the second half of the eighteenth century was tardy. Since its fate was very closely linked with that of the entire province, its experience could not be of a smooth process. The pioneers of the English company had chosen Calcutta as a place of their settlement for the purpose of their trade only. The sudden political changes in the middle of the century brought the bonanza for Calcutta. Its wide hinterland where commercialisation of crops had already begun was an aid to its growth. The agricultural surplus of a vast area was exported out mainly to Europe and China through Calcutta. The regular and unlimited transfer of surplus from Bengal to other parts of India, to China and to Europe, obviously took its toll. Bengal witnessed a tremendous squeeze of its resources and barely a minimum was left to be invested for the development of the town.

Since the Company as the government had a negligible resource to spend towards the development of Calcutta it was the rich elite of the town who used to undertake certain civic works. As it was the policy of the Company to charge rent on all available land in the town, the lands were to be disposed of. All the lands were disposed of by the Company keeping a minimum in its own hand. Now the owners of the lands were bound to develop their properties so that they could regularly remit their dues to the government. Defaults meant dispossession.

The most important changes brought about by the Company was the sense of a property-right. If a person could

clear his property-dues to the state then this right became inalienable. This was the basic change brought in Calcutta. The best guarantor of this right was the judiciary and undoubtedly, the courts performed remarkably in protecting the rights of the individuals. So the people began to feel that investment in Calcutta-lands was always secured. Moreover, the political and administrative importance of Calcutta also allured people to come and settle in the town. Calcutta witnessed the growth of the banians. Since those banians had wide connections and large patronage they could own huge properties in the town. And to reap a maximum dividend from their investments they often undertook certain development works too. As the law permitted them to own as much land as possible, Calcutta witnessed the growth of large estates of some opulent families. These people whether Indian or foreigner tried to provide some sort of civic amenities to their tenants. Yet in the town potable water was in short supply and roads were narrow. Since the bazars were viewed as an area of investment from where immediate returns were possible, all rich men fought among themselves for the control and ownership of bazars. Hence Calcutta grew up as a town much oriented towards bazar.

Another major hurdle for Calcutta towards its development as a town was a lack of initiative on the part of its colonial rulers. Though the Company purchased the rights of *zamindari* of three villages of Sutanuti, Gobindapur and Calcutta in 1698 and, could also procure the right to purchase another neighbouring 38 villages in 1717 it failed to settle the actual boundaries of the town till 1794. An undefined boundary created a lot of problems. The administration meant to the Company in Calcutta, was revenue administration. For a regular flow of income the Company earnestly needed to maintain a well-lubricated revenue administration which it was capable of setting up. But this did not ensure the development of a town and the growth of amenities of its inhabitants. Since the develop-

ment works, however rudimentary in nature, were chiefly undertaken by the individual residents, their rights had to be secured. Hence the regular maintenance of a police force was viewed by the colonial rulers as a necessity for the town. But a little reformation in the police arrangement of the town did not mean that the rulers took initiative in social activities which would make the settlement flourish.

The paucity of fund was such that the much desired territorial growth of Calcutta after the battle of Palasi was not materialised. The landmass which had been identified by Alexander Hamilton as the "Company's Colony" long ago,<sup>1</sup> remained more or less same during the entire second half of eighteenth century. But this does not mean that the adjoining areas were of no help to Calcutta. The suburbs were utilised as best as they could be. And here was another crux of the problem. The suburbs were directly administered by the Collector of the town. This arrangement could easily remove the long existing barrier between the town proper and the suburbs. But the Company's initiative to that effect was nil. On the contrary, its policy was to keep the suburbs as the suppliers of goods and services to the town. Hence its villagers had to work for the town-people, its water-ways used to bring goods from distant places, its gardens were occupied by the rich men, Indian as well as foreigners. But nothing was done to provide civic amenities to the people residing in those suburbs.

Above all a town is a living thing. But the demographic structure of the entire province during the period under study, suffered seriously. Natural calamities took their tolls again and again. There was another problem of

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1. Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East India*, (London, 1744) vol II. p. 16. Hamilton writes, "The Company's Colony is limited by a land-mark at Govindapoor (sic), and another near Baranagore (sic), about six miles distant; and the Salt water lake bounds it on the land side."

very fundamental nature which caused a wide range of decadance in this country. K. N. Chaudhuri has drawn our attention to the fact that there was no effort to raise the productivity of labour.<sup>2</sup> A large number of jobless people began to flock at Calcutta for their livelihood. Since the growth of Calcutta was possible at the expense of other towns like, Murshidabad, Dhaka, Hughli, Patna etc., Calcutta witnessed the endless emigration of people. But all of them could not procure suitable occupations. There were also no public arrangement to accommodate them neither the economic climate was congenial. Hence, Calcutta's cultural life during the period under study, remained under the shadow of an imperfect social growth.

The point which thus emerges is that Calcutta during the period of our study, passed through a crisis. It had to suffer from certain inherent constraints of a colonial township. The demands on Calcutta were too pressing. A crisis was evident in all aspects of life. This was reflected in the formation of towns also. India witnessed the formation of colonial township during the period under study. Those towns had no natural growth nor did they receive the patronage or "prodigality" of a benevolent ruler. The colonial masters had no interest in mobilising funds nor did they have any avowed policy in urbanising India. So Calcutta presented a glaring instance of haphazard growth totally devoid of planning and skill. Growth through retardation is a paradox of history. Calcutta in the eighteenth century remains to be a case where history unfolded itself in a paradox.

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<sup>2</sup>. K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 273-4.

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Soumitra Sreemani was born in Calcutta and gained his Master's degree at the Calcutta University. He also received the Ph.D. degree of the Rabindra Bharati University by this thesis. At present he teaches modern Indian history at a degree college under the Calcutta University. He has published a number of research papers in various journals and lectured extensively on the growth and development of Calcutta. He is currently engaged in the studies of the nineteenth century Calcutta.



Calcutta, Sutanuti and Gobindapur — three villages on the bank of the river Hughli were first purchased and then conquered by the English East India Company. With the fall of the independent Nawab and his administration in the province, the foreign trading company fully utilised the situation to foster its trade. Calcutta became its centre of activities — a seat of power and administration and also a meeting point of the east-west trade. But the lack of fund and proper patronage in the public level to build Calcutta - a town made room for private initiative in several ways. Much has been said and written of Calcutta's journey from village to the second capital of the mighty British empire. The present study is not a chronicle of those events but it tries to locate the contours of such urbanisation.